

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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VEDIC PRAYERS

कस्तवा युनक्ति स त्वा युनक्ति
कस्मै त्वा युनक्ति तस्मै त्वा युनक्ति ।
कर्मणे वां वेषाय वाम् ॥

—Śukla Yajur Veda, 1.6

Who has united you (with the body and mind)? He (ie, the supreme Being) has united you. Why have you been so united? He has united you for His sake (ie, for the accomplishment of His work). The human being has been created for accomplishing God's work.

अग्ने व्रतपते व्रतं चरिष्यामि
तच्छकेयं तन्मे राध्यताम् ।
इदमहमनृतात्सत्यमुपैमि ॥

—Śukla Yajur Veda, 1.4

O Agni! You are the protector of vows (*vratas*). I shall undertake a vow (ie, shall perform a noble act). May I be able to perform it successfully. May I benefit by undertaking it. May I go from untruth to Truth by your grace.

Trees and Us

EDITORIAL

Trees promote life. They exhale oxygen by inhaling our bad breath. They provide water: they help conserve water for the use of other forms of life. They are our hope in fighting global warming, caused directly by the major heat-trapping gas, carbon dioxide. *Time* (9 April 2001) reports the ongoing global warming, but adds that 'one hectare of forest can sponge up 13.6 tons of CO₂ per year.'

Trees bring food. They themselves eat little that they produce, but feed life. Their fruits, foliage, flowers, bark, etc, are all food for other forms of life. Their bodies are a major source of fuel even now.

Trees provide shelter. They themselves stand in rain and storm and sun and snow but provide sanctuary and comfort to other creatures. The nest of the bird and the house of the human being are due to the sacrifice of trees. Our clothing, houses, heating system, food, in fact, everything comes from trees.

Trees bestow beauty. Nature's beauty would mean nothing were it not for these sylvan splendours, specially those trees with their green and yellow, red and purple leaves as well as flowers of countless shades. But for the tall and short, broad and thin trees, where could we go for beauty? Let alone their lush green munificence, even dry leaves, broken twigs, limp branches and dying wood are subjects for the artist's imagination. Whoever thinks of nature and her beauty without thinking of trees? Trees have added colour to life. They catch the sun but provide cool perspectives for the eyes.

Trees heal wounds. Imagine the number of diseases they cure! Numerous medicines that we use today come from trees. Trees make us healthy and strong. Further, they heal the mind. The disturbed mind may run to some forest or park and find peace in their company.

These patient soldiers, posted everywhere by God, cool the mind and heart, and bring peace. Trees heal broken hearts.

Trees help movement. They themselves don't move but make the world move. They remain poor but make the world rich.

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Trees are friends. All moving creatures depend on trees for their survival. Birds and animals, reptiles and insects, all count on trees. Like a mother, the tree endures the crawling, chirping, burrowing, etc of small and big birds, large and tiny insects. The human being has a trusted friend here.

Trees are saints. Sri Sankara speaking about springtime says that the spring season is like the saint who silently benefits humanity. By spring the tree too is implied. The tree gives everything it has to others and silently suffers the pain inflicted upon it.

Trees feel; this's a scientific fact. They weep when they are hurt, smile when they are happy, and sympathize with the other forms of life.

Here's a real-life story that happened sometime back. A lady would feed a tree at her house with loving care. To this tree she had fixed the instrument that detects the sentiments expressed by trees. Whenever she would approach the tree, it would express feelings of love and joy. One day, however, the tree was seen sending bad signals. The lady was concerned and just noted the time. Three days later, a telegram came saying that her son had passed away in some distant city in a road accident. The time tallied to the minute.

Trees don't hate. They know neither religious bigotry nor professional jealousy. Of course, owing to natural difficulties the fittest ones survive; but there is by and large no animosity in the tree-world.

Trees spawn saints. They accept a Gautama Siddhartha from the world and give back a Buddha. So the service of trees is extended to the spiritual domain also. Since ages, most of the saints and sages have resorted to the cool laps of huge trees in order to perform austerities. The would-be yogi sits under the tree, determined to attain perfection. The tree provides inspiration to him. It feeds the tired soul with its fruit. It lulls the *tapas*-tired body of the yogi to rest. It blows cool air with its tender leaves to cool his austerity-worn body. And when the yogi becomes illumined, the tree bids him adieu with tears.

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Trees teach. Their first lesson is endurance. Chill winds blow, rivers overflow, rains pour, storms shatter, lightnings strike, fires rage—yet trees struggle to stand. So Sri Chaitanya said that we should be as patient as the tree.

The second lesson trees teach is perseverance. Come what may, trees struggle their utmost to survive and grow. If all is lost and even if a small twig or a seed remains, that will struggle to grow into another huge tree. To struggle and rise higher and higher is their motto. You don't hear about trees committing suicide. They are positive in their approach to life. And why do they survive at all? For the good of others!

The third lesson we learn from trees is simplicity. The beauty of trees is natural. There's no embellishment here. There is no cosmetic surgery or make-up, but still trees look beautiful. Trees don't mimic others. They never pretend to be others. They are their own selves.

The fourth lesson of trees is purity. Is there an impure tree? Impurity comes from selfishness. Trees only give. Again, everything is open here. There's an air of purity around anything concerning the tree. Haven't hermits run to the forest for attaining purity?

The fifth lesson trees teach is serenity.

You see very little selfishness in trees: a little water, air, sunlight—and there the demands end. Greed is not their forte. The tree takes very little from nature and gives enormously in return. If at all there's discontent, it is in giving: trees are never tired of giving.

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Trees also teach the vital spiritual truth of impermanence. Life is transitory: here today, gone tomorrow. Trees shed their leaves today and new leaves grow by the morrow. Remember how Brother Lawrence was transformed by seeing a tree shedding its leaves? Standing all around, trees repeatedly tell us that life is brief. They also report that there's something permanent behind this show. But the din of the city makes us deaf to sensitive sounds.

But some have heard. The sages of the Vedas had sharp ears. They heard. And they discovered truths. Our sages were fond of trees. They used the tree example to explain terse Vedantic truths. The most surprising ex-

ample they cite to establish the transitoriness of the world is that of the peepal tree, the *āśvattha*.

The *āśvattha* is famous in Indian religious literature as the pip-pala tree, scientifically called *Ficum religiosa*. Sri Sankara explains that *āśvattha* means impermanence. 'That which does not exist tomorrow, *a-śva*' is the true nature of all life. The peepal tree, though famous as undying, is taken as the best example for transitoriness. Why? Look at us; we too think we are undying, don't we?

How do our scriptures explain impermanence using the tree instance? Here's an example. The 15th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* discusses creation in a remarkable way.¹ Creation or manifestation or projection comes from some supreme source. Comparing creation to the inverted peepal tree, Krishna tells Arjuna that the roots of creation are above while its

**...trees are
never tired
of serving
human beings...**

1. The roots-above-and-branches-below idea is expressed by the *Kātha Upaniṣad* (2.6.1) also.

leaves and branches are below. The source of the projection of the universe is eternal and so 'above', while the manifestation itself, which is ever-changeable, is 'below'. The manifestation is impermanent while the roots or source is eternal. The Sāṃkhyan theory of creation, which says that everything starts with *mūla-prakṛti* and ends in gross manifestation, is the idea behind this inverted-tree example.

What do we learn from this cosmic tree of creation? We learn about what is eternal and what is impermanent. We learn that we too are like this *āśvattha* tree. Our externals may change but the innermost core is eternal. The cosmic peepal tree is imperishable (*avyaya*) in the sense that, though manifestations change, the underlying Principle is eternal. That is, the root or eternal Principle alone is real. And that Principle is the source of supreme bliss.

We human beings are miniature worlds. Our bodies are like the manifested world; they keep changing continually: we keep on donning newer bodies. But there is something eternal and permanent behind this body, which is not the mind. It is the Ātman. The Ātman or Self is the root of this manifestation called the body and mind. Our only goal, therefore, is to know what is real and forget the unreal.

How to reach the Ātman? Trees teach us that too. They teach us two simple methods: one is sacrifice, and the other is service.

Trees produce timber, leaves, bark, fruits, flowers, etc, and even breathe—for the good of others. Their lives are meant for others. And, as Khalil Gibran remarks beautifully in *The Prophet*, they give unhesitatingly 'as in a yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. Through the hands of such as these God speaks....' Do you say you give only to the deserving? 'The trees in your orchard say not so.' It's in giving that they attain their fullness.

Trees are saints. There is no record of how many people trees have killed in this world. But there is some idea of how many forests human beings have destroyed and are destroying. In spite of such unending destruction, trees are never tired of serving the human being. That is their glorious teaching.

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Trees suffer. Human beings revel in destruction. Urbanization and deforestation are proportional to one another. The denser the human population, the lesser the number of trees. Trees grow somewhere in remote regions where the human hand hesitates to reach. But the human being has instruments which the tree can never dream of manufacturing. Using them, has felled trees at a faster rate during the last few decades than he ever did before.

The idea of greening the planet is an old one. Ecologists are fighting a hard battle against deforestation and, thanks to their persistent efforts, there's some success too. But much needs to be done. So the eco-balance issue is as fresh now as it was a few decades ago. This number of *Prabuddha Bharata* is dedicated to ecology.

Let's plant trees. Let trees grow everywhere. They will not only help us materially, but will also help us mentally and spiritually. Trees have been created to help us. We are not rivals but friends. Let's not destroy them. There was a mythical bird with two heads. One head became jealous of the other and consumed poison. Let's not do that.

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Finally, why an issue on dumb trees? The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (3.9) answers: 'All this is filled up by that Person (ie God). There is nothing superior or inferior in relation to Him. He alone exists in His own effulgent glory, unmoving and silent like the tree.' The tree stands for the Supreme. □



IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

How Wonderful Shāhjahān Was!

'Shāntidās Jawhari, the leading Jain jeweller and banker in Ahmadābād had great influence at the Mughal court. He was a very devout Jain, and in 1629 Shāhjahān granted land to the *poshālas* (places for a Jain to stay when fulfilling a vow) built by Shāntidās. He also built a very beautiful Jain temple near Ahmadābād. In 1654, however, Aurangzib, who was then governor of Gujarāt, converted it into a mosque by building a *mihrāb* (niche) for prayer in it. Shāntidās complained to Shāhjahān. Mulla 'Abdu'l-Hakīm, the great scholar and philosopher, declared that Aurangzib had flagrantly violated the *sharī'a* in usurping Shāntidās's property. Consequently, the mosque had no sanctity. Shāhjahān ordered that a screen be erected in front of the *mihrāb* and the temple be restored to Shāntidās. The imperial *farmān* also commanded that any material taken from the temple be restored and compensation paid for any material lost' (S.A.A. Rizvi, *The Wonder That Was India*, Vol. II, pp. 228-9).

A Rare Image of Vināyaka

Keralapuram near Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, is famous for its Vināyaka image. This image is under a peepal tree in the southeast corner of the second *prākāra*. The peculiar feature of the image is that it is black for six months and white for the rest of the year. The marble-like white stone is dazzlingly bright. One leg of the image is broken, and there's a traditional story behind it. The priest of the temple would visit a house of ill-fame. An old man would dissuade him from doing this. The priest would brush him aside. One day, however, the old man knocked at the door of the house the priest had gone to. Enraged at this, the priest pushed him. The old man fell down and broke his leg. Next day, the priest went to the temple and saw the leg of the idol mutilated. The priest realized that the old man was none other than Vināyaka himself. He changed his ways and prayed to the Lord to forgive his transgressions. According to the records of the Travancore Archaeological Department, the earliest stone inscription in the temple goes back to 1317 AD (cf. S.Padmanabhan, *Temples in Kanyakumari District*, pp. 92-3).



Giribala Devi

You Will Not Believe This!

The now defunct *Bharatavarsha* (Shravana, 1343) reported something strange 65 years ago. A lady by name Giribala Devi did not eat anything for over 56 years! She was a lawyer's sister from Bankura district, and widowed at 12 years of age. She was 68 when the report was published. Giribala would eat only one tulsi leaf per day and avoided drinking water also. She did all her household work. She practised some yogic exercises and that kept her well, she claimed. The then king of Burdwan had arranged to test the truth of her claims and had declared that she was genuine.

Sacred Trees of the Hindus

Mythological and Social Linkages

DR SATISH K. KAPOOR

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Trees being nature's major processors of solar energy which is vital for our existence, and yielding flowers, fruit, wood or medicine, have been worshipped by the Hindus as a matter of gratitude. Manu believed that they were conscious like humans and felt pleasure and pain. Indian sages and seers eulogized aśvattha or peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), gular (*Ficus glomerata*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), bel (*Aegle marmelos*), bargad or banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*), aśoka (*Sereca indica*), āmalā (*Phyllanthus emblica*), arjuna (*Terminalia arjuna*) and many other trees which acquired social and religious sanctity with the passage of time.

Bel, rudrākṣa (seeds of *Elaeocarpus*) and ber (*Zizyphus jujuba*) are considered dear to Lord Śiva; sāla (*Shorea robusta*) and pipal to Lord Viṣṇu; kadamba (*Anthocephalus cadamba*) to Lord Kṛṣṇa; mango (*Mangifera indica*) to Lord Hanumān; aśoka to Kāmādeva; silk cotton (*Bombax malabaricum*) to the goddess Lakṣmī; and coconut or śrīphala (*Cocos nucifera*) to Varuṇa or the lord of waters, and to many other gods and goddesses.

The five trees (*pañca-vṛkṣa*) which adorn Lord Indra's garden (Nandana) in his paradise (Svarga) are: (1) mandāra (*Erythrina stricta*) with scarlet flowers in horizontal clusters at the ends of branches; its shade relieves one of physical ailments and mental stress; (2) pārijāta (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) with bark of gold, leaves of copper colour, and fragrant, rejuvenative fruit; it arose out of the ocean of milk and was taken away by Indra to his paradise from where it was brought to Dvārakā by Lord

Kṛṣṇa at the instance of his wife Satyabhāmā. After the passing away of the Lord and the submerging of Dvārakā in the ocean, it was taken back to heaven; (3) samtanaka, a tree of wonder having leaves which promote fertility in men; its identification remains obscure; (4) haricandana or sandalwood (*Santalum album*) well known for its fragrance and cooling effect, it keeps evil spirits at bay; and (5) kalpa vṛkṣa or kalpa taru, the tree of eternity which emerged as a result of the churning of the ocean of milk; it was lifted to Svarga by Indra, and is frequently mentioned in Sanskrit literature for its wish-fulfilling quality.

The Paurāṇic lore has it that Brahmā metamorphosed into a palāśa, Viṣṇu into a pipal and Rudra into a bargad after being cursed by Pārvatī, the wife of Lord Śiva. Neem is customarily believed to be the abode of the goddess Śītalā; pipal of the goddess Lakṣmī (on Sundays), āmalā of both Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva, and śamī (*Ficus benjamina*) of Lord Hanumān, the son of the wind-god. Deodar (*Polylathis longifolia*) is believed to be the adopted child of Lord Śiva. Pipal is said to form a link between earth and heaven. The flowers of five trees—aśoka, mango, navamal-likā (*Ixora parviflora*), pink lotus (*Nelumbe nucifera*) and blue lotus (*Nymphae stellata*)—adorn the tip of the bow of Kāma, the god of love. Kadamba reminds one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's flute and bargad of Lord Śiva's matted hair which reflect in the tangled roots of the tree.

Some trees are considered sacred due to

their association with prophets and holy men. The bargad, for example, is sacred to Hindus because the sage Mārkaṇḍeya took shelter on its branches during the deluge; Lord Rāma lived in a grove under five banyan trees near Nasik when he was in exile; and Lord Kṛṣṇa played around it during his childhood. Sāla is sacred to Buddhists because Lord Buddha took birth and passed away under it; so are pipal and bargad, as the Lord meditated under them for gaining supreme realization. The trees considered sacred in the Jaina tradition were associated in some way with the Tirthaṅkaras: bargad with Ṛṣabha Deva, sāla with Śāmbhavanātha and Mahāvira, bel with Śitalanātha, kadamba with Vasupūjya, pipal with Ananta, aśoka with Mallinātha, and bakula with Neminātha. Ber (jujube) is viewed with reverence by the Sikhs because Guru Nānak Dev planted a sapling of it on the banks of the river Bein when he was at Sultanpur Lodhi. Guru Gobind Singh stayed under a jujube tree in the village of Seeloana in Ludhiana district. Both the sites have been converted into shrines. The riṭhā tree under which Guru Nānak Dev sat during his sojourn in the Himalayas, began to bear sweet fruit, and now a shrine has come up centred around it. The ber under which Bābā Buddha (1506-1621) used to sit supervising the excavation of the sacred pool at the Amritsar Golden Temple has also become an object of worship for the devotees.

Specific directions for the plantation of sacred trees are mentioned in the *Vṛkṣa Āyurveda*: bargad should be planted in the eastern side of the house; bel and peepal in the west; mango and āmalā in the south; aśoka in the southeast; and itti, a wave-leaved fig tree, in the north. Auspicious stars for planting them all are Svāti, Hastā, Rohiṇī, Śrāvaṇa and Mūlā.

The day, time, month or occasion of worship of sacred trees has a mythical, astrological or utilitarian basis. Āmalā and pipal are worshipped specially in the month of Kārtika (October-November), bel and gular in Śrāvaṇa (July-August), kadamba in Āṣāḍha (June-

July), śamī in Āśvina (September-October), bargad in Jyeṣṭha (May-June), and so on. A number of festivals and *vratas* are also observed in their honour as per the table given at the end of this article.

Due to their ecological value and efficacious properties, trees continue to be used in the religious and social ceremonies of the Hindus. The trunk of banana is used to erect welcoming gates and its leaves to make the ceremonial pavilion. The five most sacred leaves—of peepal, gular, pilkhan (*Ficus lacor*), bargad and mango—are ubiquitously employed in making prayers and offerings. On auspicious occasions, mango leaves are tied to a string and hung on doors; leaves of palāśa and bargad make workable plates and bowls during community feasts. Leaves of some other trees are also customarily offered to deities—of bel to Lord Śiva, of banana and arjuna to Lord Gaṇeśa, and of amaltās (*Cassia fistula*) to all the gods and goddesses. The red flowers of the Indian coral tree are used in the worship of Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva; of kaner (*Nerium indicum*) in the worship of Lord Śiva and the Sun-god; of ketaki (*Yucca gloriosa*) in the worship of Lakṣmī, and of panas or breadfruit (*Artocarpus integrifolia*) in the worship of Lord Viṣṇu. The use of some flowers is prohibited in worship rites—of śiriṣa or parrot tree (*Albizia lebeck*) in the worship of Lord Gaṇeśa and vijaya sāla (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) in the worship of Lord Śiva. Supārī or areca nut which symbolizes Lord Gaṇeśa is commonly used in various rites. Banana is offered to Lord Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī on the eleventh day of the bright half of Pauṣa (December-January) and to the Sun-god on the sixth day of the bright fortnight of Kārtika (October-November). Mango and bel fruits are also included in the worship material—the former is offered to all gods, the latter especially to Lord Śiva.

The wood of sacred trees like bel, bargad, śamī, palāśa and pipal is never used as fuel as it invites the wrath of gods. But it is employed, in other ways, in sacrificial rites and ceremonies. Sandalwood is turned into paste and

applied to the forehead. The wooden seat used during the sacred thread ceremony is made of mango or palāśa; the *brahmacārin* is also made to walk with a stick of palāśa. During the sacred thread ceremony the *brahmacārin* has to perform sacrifice using pipal twigs called *samit*. After a person dies, twigs of bel are placed near the central pillar of the house and those of neem scattered near the corpse.

Sacred trees are invoked on special days for long life, for the expiation of sins, for averting mishaps, or for the fulfilment of a particular wish. Young girls are symbolically wedded to the pipal tree or bel fruit to avoid future widowhood. Tree trunks are tied with thread and circumambulated 108 times and adorned with vermilion and sandal-paste; earthen lamps are lighted under them — and the effect of all these is considered equal to a thousand sacrifices. The Śaivites count prayers by using rosaries made of rudrākṣa berries.

Kauṭilya laid down that those who cut even small branches or sprouts of trees yielding fruit and flowers, or providing shade in parks, places of pilgrimage, hermitages, and cremation or burial grounds should be sternly dealt with. In ancient India, people offered prayers and performed other rites to expiate themselves from the crime of harming or uprooting a holy tree. To plant a pipal, banyan or some other sacred tree at a holy place or on the roadside continues to be regarded by the Hindus as an act of virtue. The *Br̥hat Parāśara Smṛti* (10.379) admonishes in this context: 'He who plants and nurtures the following trees will never see hell: one each of the holy fig (pipal), margosa (neem) and banyan (bargad), ten tamarind trees and three each of wood apple, the holy bel, myrobalan and five mango trees.' The Hindu religious mind was thus keen on environmental stability. □

Important Festivals or Vratas Related to Trees

Name of the Tree	Related Festival or Vrata	Time of Celebration and Rituals
Āmalā	Āmalaka Ekādaśī	11th day of Phālguna śukla; bath with water soaked in āmalā fruit; eating it; worshipping it; and worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.
Āmra or Mango	Āmra-puṣpa Bhakṣaṇa Vrata	1st day of Caitra śukla; eating of mango blossoms and worship of Kāmadeva.
Aśoka	Aśoka Pratipada	1st day of Caitra śukla; only women worship the tree; they also observe fast seeking longevity.
Bakula	Bakula Amāvāsyā	Bakula flowers are offered to the manes, seeking their blessings.
Vaṭa or Bargad	Vaṭa Sāvitrī Vrata	Jyeṣṭha pūrṇimā or amāvāsyā day; having fasted for three previous days, married women worship the bargad tree by circumambulating, tying with the sacred protective thread (<i>raṁṣā sūtra</i>), and listening to the sacred Sāvitrī-Satyavān story; some women stay awake during the night and complete the vow by feeding a brahmin; in western parts of India, devout women observe this vow for five consecutive years after marriage.

Name of the Tree	Related Festival or Vrata	Time of Celebration and Rituals
Bilva or Bel	Bilva Tri-rātri Vrata	On a Tuesday of Jyeṣṭha pūrṇimā when the constellation is Jyeṣṭha; worship of the bel tree for three consecutive nights as per Hemādri's injunctions in the <i>Skanda Purāṇa</i> ; the vow comprises bath with water mixed with mustard seeds, partaking of sacred sāttvic food (<i>haviṣyānna</i>), adorning the tree with two pieces of red cloth and placing the image of Umā-Maheśvara beneath it; <i>homa</i> is performed and 1,008 bilva leaves are offered; brahmins are fed.
Bilva or Bel	Śrāvaṇa Kṛṣṇa Ekādaśī	Ceremonial offering of water to the bel tree.
Bilva or Bel	Bhādra Śukla Caturthī	Offering of trifoliate leaves of bel to Lord Gaṇeśa
Bilva or Bel	Bilva Nimantraṇa	Āśvina śukla ṣaṣṭhī; summoning the tree-goddess and worshipping the Devī.
Bilva or Bel	Bilva Saptamī	Āśvina śukla saptamī; a twig of bel, bearing two fruits, is offered to Devī.
Bilva or Bel	Bilva Navamī	Āśvina śukla navamī; bel leaves are offered to Śiva.
Karavīra or Kaner or Oleander (<i>Nerium indicum</i>)	Karavīra Vrata	Jyeṣṭha śukla prathamā tithi; kaner roots and branches are bathed and adorned with red cloth; offerings of seven cereals (<i>sapta dhānya</i>) and fruit are made followed by fasting; Sāvitṛī, Satyabhāmā, and others performed this when they were in trouble.
Kadaḷī or Kelā	Kadaḷī Vrata	Vaiśākha, Māgha or Kārtika śukla caturdaśī; a banana tree is planted and nurtured till it bears fruit; wishing the welfare of one's family, a person should worship the tree with flowers, fruit, etc and circumambulate it.
Kadaḷī or Kelā	Yakṣa-śamantaka Kadaḷī Vrata	A golden banana tree is worshipped and offered to a brahmin on any auspicious day.
Kevaḍā or Screw Pine (<i>Panadanus odoratissimus</i>)	Kevaḍā Teej	Bhādra śukla tṛtīyā; soliciting unbroken married life, women offer Kevaḍā leaves to Lord Śiva.
Neem	Śitalā Pūjā	Caitra navarātras; goddess Śitalā who is said to reside in the neem tree is propitiated ritually; Pat Gosain festival in Bengal means neem tree worship; neem leaves are eaten on Vaiśākha śukla saptamī.
Please note: For want of space many other festivals have been left out.		

Green Economics

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Green economics is all about sustainability and social justice: finding and sustaining such means of creating wealth as will allow us to meet the genuine needs of all people without damaging our fragile biosphere. It implies a straight choice between what we have now (a consumer economy) and what we will need in the near future (a conserver economy). It is no longer possible to manufacture abundance through making unsustainable demands on the world's resources and environment; we must therefore substitute more appropriate patterns of consumption that will make for wiser use of both the world's resources and the human resources at our disposal. The Ecology Party's booklet on employment, *Working for a Future*, looks forward to such an economy in these terms:

In the long run all nations will *have* to learn how to manage the demands of their people in a stable-state economy. The characteristics of such an economy are clear: reduced industrial throughput, greater self-reliance and sustainability through largely decentralized economic activity, maximized use of renewable resources, a far-reaching redistribution of wealth, land, and the means of production, with the possibility of more fulfilling, personally satisfying work, all set within a more cooperatively-based framework, and enhanced by the use of new technologies where they complement the above features.

Economics is not primarily about rates of growth, or tinkering with the money supply, or any other vague macroeconomic abstractions: it's about the work we do, and the rewards we get from that work. According to

Thomas Aquinas, 'There can be no joy of life without the joy of work.' The active participation of people in the work of their society, rather than their displacement from it, strikes me as a precondition for the development of any sane, sustainable society. According to the ecologist's ideal definition of work, it should (a) provide a reasonable standard of living, (b) be personally satisfying, (c) be environmentally sound, (d) be socially useful, (e) be available for everyone who wants it.

Work, whether paid or unpaid, should offer everyone the opportunity of fulfilment in confirming his or her own worth and relationships with others. Ever since the start of the Industrial Revolution, politicians and economists have worried themselves about supply and demand, productivity levels, the balance of payments, government spending or the international debt. The emphasis has always been on the product and the money involved; they have scorned the process and the people who make it possible. The consequences of this are only now apparent, for it is no longer realistic to go on as we do now, ignoring basic human needs and deliberately destroying the planet in the process.

The tragedy of the global commons shows us time after time that the market is no respecter of the Earth's carrying capacity, and its inability to take any kind of long-term view ensures that private, not public, interests are served first. Moreover, it is no respecter of the social and environmental costs inflicted on us today, and so successfully manipulates people into patterns of conspicuous consumption as to ensure that these costs must go on rising.

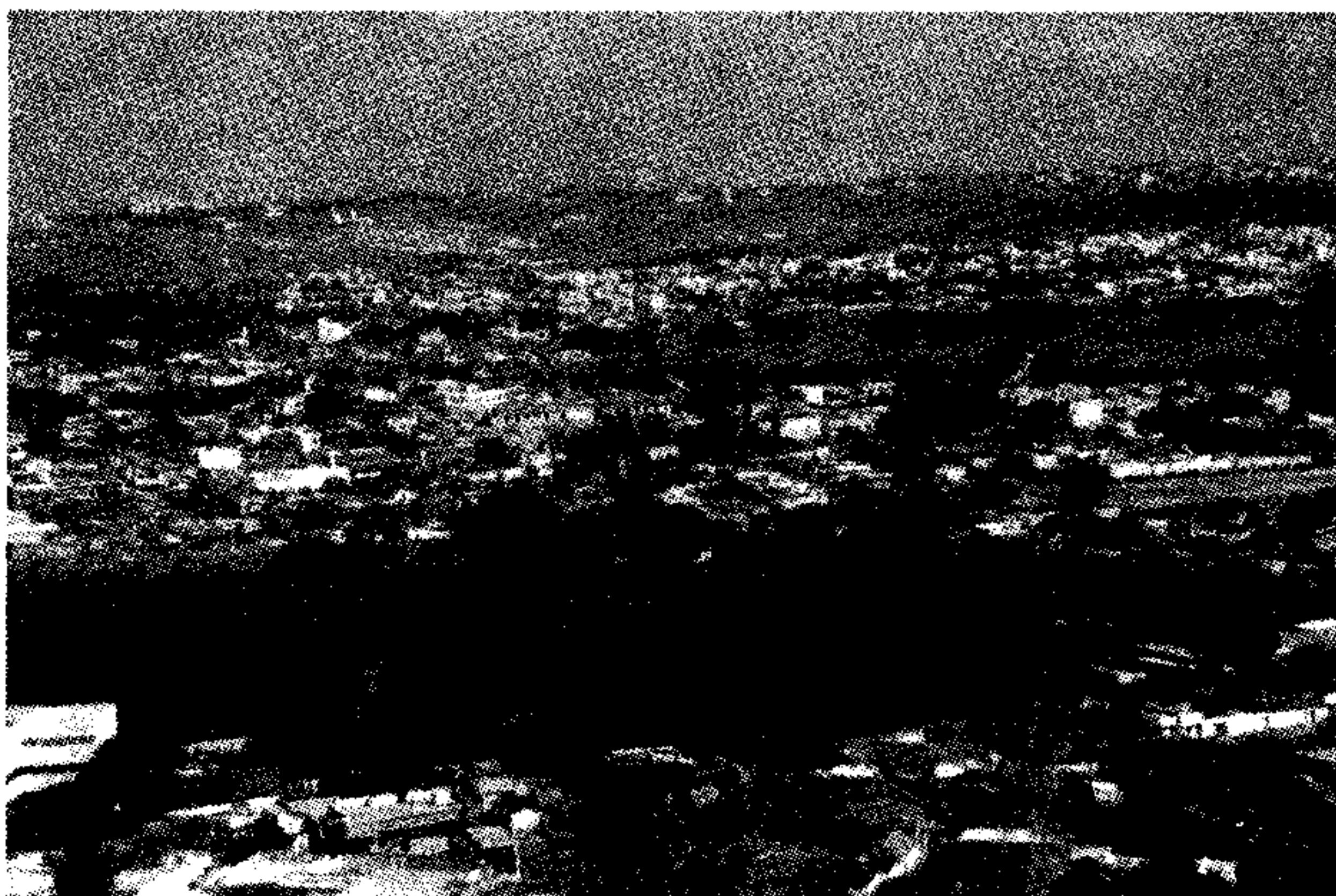
Ecologists lay great stress on the element of *self-reliance*, both at the national and the local levels. Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, world trade has built up increasingly complex patterns of interdependence, leaving many countries in a highly vulnerable position. A lot of unadulterated nonsense is talked about the advantages of free trade, despite the fact that it is neither free nor particularly advantageous. The 'roller-coaster of world trade' rides roughshod over genuine human needs, and in the process of disrupting every local society and ecosystem on the planet causes untold social, cultural and ecological damage.

Green economics is an attempt to blend the old wisdom of the Earth with the dynamic potential of new technologies. Hence the encouragement of new industries (for in the transition to the sustainable society these will emerge as rapidly as the old ones fade),

and the emphasis on new skills and new ways of doing business. But ecologists combine this new-age sophistication with the realization that the finite resources of the planet will simply not stretch to sustaining endless economic activity carried out purely as a means of providing work, increasing profits or raising the levels of GNP. Hence the parallel emphasis on the primary sector of the economy, which in today's glossy abstracted world may seem somewhat unfashionable. Most economists and politicians conveniently manage to ignore the primacy of our agriculture, raw materials, mines, forestry, energy resources and fisher-

ies, but this will inevitably change as we are forced to base our economy on the pursuit of sustainability rather than growth.

It should also become clear how a more decentralized sustainable society, in which the overheads and the running costs of today's astonishingly wasteful, unhealthy and alienating way of life have been all but eliminated, would be immeasurably more economic in the true sense of the word. Nonetheless, considerable sums of money will be needed to finance the transition. Unless the money is spent *now*, ensuring a peaceful and socially acceptable transformation, it is absolutely certain that it



Rapid urbanization...

will not be available in the future. It is therefore imperative to use our diminishing capital wealth, and the even more rapidly diminishing returns from a growth-oriented economy, to effect the transformation before it is too late.

The dilemma is simply stated: for every year we delay making a move in the right direction, the consequences become proportionately more serious. Developed and Third World countries alike must seek to map out a different course for themselves, moving towards a sustainable society based on renewable resources and the elimination of waste. The challenge is to meet the inner demands of basic human needs without violating the outer limits of the planet's wealth. The old system is bankrupt, and it is only the wisdom of ecology that will show us how to create a new economic order.

Aranyāni—The Forest Mother

NARENDRA NARAYAN CHOWDHURY

Our Vedic sages loved nature. They studied nature in depth. Their knowledge of the herbs and trees and clouds and waters was wonderful. They were poets too and their nature poetry is marvellous. Based on an article by the author, published decades ago in the now defunct Bengali Manasi (Agrahayan, 1333 BE), we present an appraisal of a few of their ideas.

Our ancient sages ran away from the man-made, artificial world and resorted to the lap of nature. They loved to stay amidst the exquisite beauty of trees and plants, animals and birds. Whichever side the sages saw, they saw beauty. Their descriptions of the beauty of nature thrills us even now.

Let alone the descriptions of the Vedic sages, even those of later sages like Valmiki's or Bhavabhuti's accounts of the forests during Rama's and Krishna's time are electrifying. The trees of the forest are so pained at Sita's abduction, and they are consoling Sita and Rama in numerous ways, as the poet sees them. The birds and the animals, the little insects and the creeping reptiles—all are bonded in love.

Coming to the Vedic sages, they belonged to an age which is far, far removed from us. It's all a story of several ages before. Yet the beauty of their description captures our imagination even today; their accounts of nature are as fresh as ever. Here's a small paragraph from the *R̥k Samhitā* (*R̥g Veda*, 10.146):

*Aranyāni aranyāni
asau yā preva naśyasi;
Kathā grāmam na prcchasi
na tvā bhīṛva vindati.*

The forest extends far and wide, reaching up to the horizon. There is no path in it at all. It never ends, as it were. So the poet addresses the forest goddess in a beautiful manner: 'O Forest Goddess (Aranyāni)! O Forest Goddess! It is as if you have lost your way in this

pathless jungle, and have disappeared somewhere. Why are you here in this forest? Don't you enquire about the villages, about the paths from someone? Don't you feel scared?

'See! Somewhere you hear the sound of the wild boar. Some other animal answers it in a loud voice. Are they combining their voices to bring about a combination of the seven notes and creating a symphony? Are they adoring Aranyāni?

'See the play of light and shade all over. It appears that somewhere cows are grazing. The creepers hanging on trees make them look like a house. It's twilight, and it appears as if many bullock carts are coming slowly out of this imaginary house.

'Who's that? Is it the cowherd calling his cows sweetly? Ah, there's the other man, cutting branches from trees. Aranyāni is not at all unhappy at what the woodcutter is doing. She doesn't hurt anyone. She doesn't wish ill to anyone.

'The sweet aroma has spread! It should be the musk-deer somewhere, searching for its own scent in the forest.' The sage of the hymn says: '*Prāhaṁ mṛgāṇām mātaram*, I adore Aranyāni, the mother of the wild animals.'

These hymns, written ages ago, aren't strange to us at all. Even now they are fresh and moving. Love of nature made the sages whole. They attained fulfilment by living in the midst of nature. We are unfortunately destroying nature, and hence our misery never seems to end. □

Religion and Environment

Strategies and Policy Perspectives

DR KIRAN PRASAD

Dr Kiran Prasad teaches communication and journalism at the Sri Padmavathi Mahila University, Tirupati. Apart from being the author of many important papers, and co-editor of The Glory of Indian Heritage, Dr Kiran is the author of Philosophies of Communication and Media Ethics (BRPC, Delhi, 2000). In this highly informative and beautiful article, Dr Kiran stresses the need for environmental safety. Save plant life for your own survival is the message. Ecology is everybody's responsibility and none can shake it off.

All societies are founded on religious, cultural, and social mores which govern their attitudes, values, and lifestyles. But these fundamental structures have been pushed to the background in the competition for rapid economic growth, mass production, and a rich lifestyle. It is being accepted grudgingly that poverty and environmental issues are interrelated. The resource degradation in the past increases today's poverty,

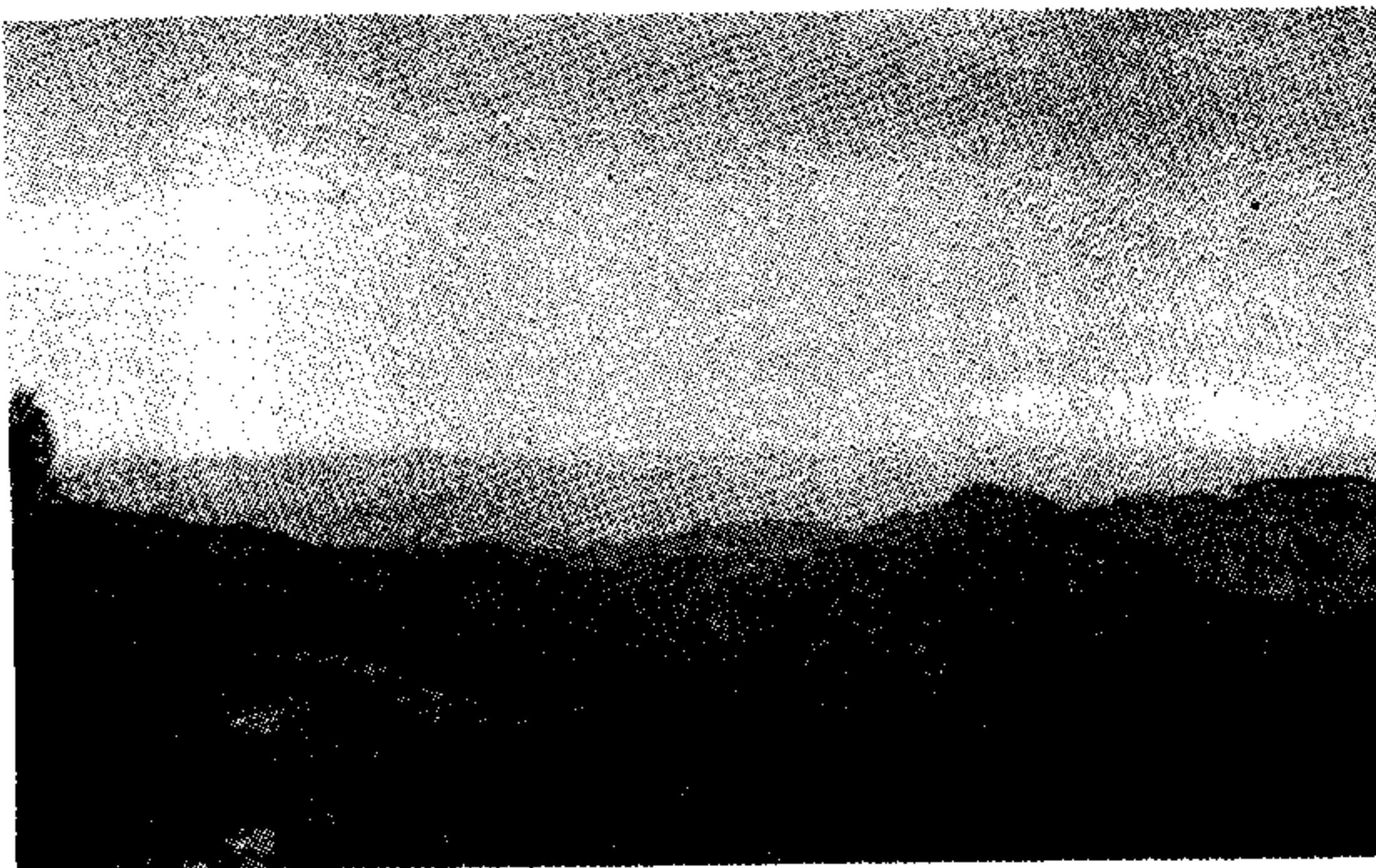
while today's poverty makes it difficult to care for the future. Many of the poorer countries which were colonies in the past were exploited by their rulers for their abundant natural resources, and after independence their own governments depleted the remaining resources for economic development. The economically prosperous nations often blame the poorer nations for environmental degradation, saying that a majority of their population are poor and live in unhygienic conditions. But the rich with their consumption and luxurious lifestyles generate more waste and put greater stress on nature and the environment

than the poor. These conditions persist within countries too. Different countries are presently evolving strategies for economic development and the sustainable use of their bio-diversity by trying to involve indigenous communities.

Environmental degradation is a global problem but it is interesting to stress the socio-cultural foundations of different nations which are facing this problem. In the course of development what attitudes

different societies assume towards the environment are determined by the value systems and political processes of decision making that operate in their respective cultures.

One of the leading philosophers of the last century, Alfred North Whitehead, opined that science and religion are the two most important forces in human history, and that more than any other single factor the future of humanity depends upon how these two great forces settle down into a relationship with one another. The western and European nations have been able to advance economically by making science part of the culture and placing



Vanishing jungles...

absolute faith in it. Many of the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in which religion is the dominant ethos, are caught in a dilemma—whether to go the western way of unbridled scientific and technological activity or hold on to safe traditional ways of living.

Eco-Religion of the Bishnois

The roots of environmental conservation go back to religion which emphasizes harmonious living with nature's creation. Several environmental practices had religious sanction and there were proscriptions against harming nature.

One of the outstanding cases is the eco-religion of the Bishnois of Rajasthan who are an unusual community with a philosophy of protecting plants and animals. They follow a set of 29 rules which include instructions on how they should live and what should be done after their death.

The faith that God adequately compensates the cultivators for all the losses caused by animals underlines the basic philosophy of the Bishnoi religion; all living things (including animals) have a right to survive and share resources. It is astonishing that more than 450 years ago, a simple villager from a remote desert area, without even the basic education, clearly understood the importance of preserving bio-diversity. He not only understood it himself, but had the wisdom to influence generations of people to preserve it by weaving it with their religion.

The Bishnoi religion was launched in 1542 AD by Guru Jambheshwarji, or Jamboji as he is affectionately referred to by his followers. He was a great saint and philosopher of the medieval period. He prescribed 29 tenets and

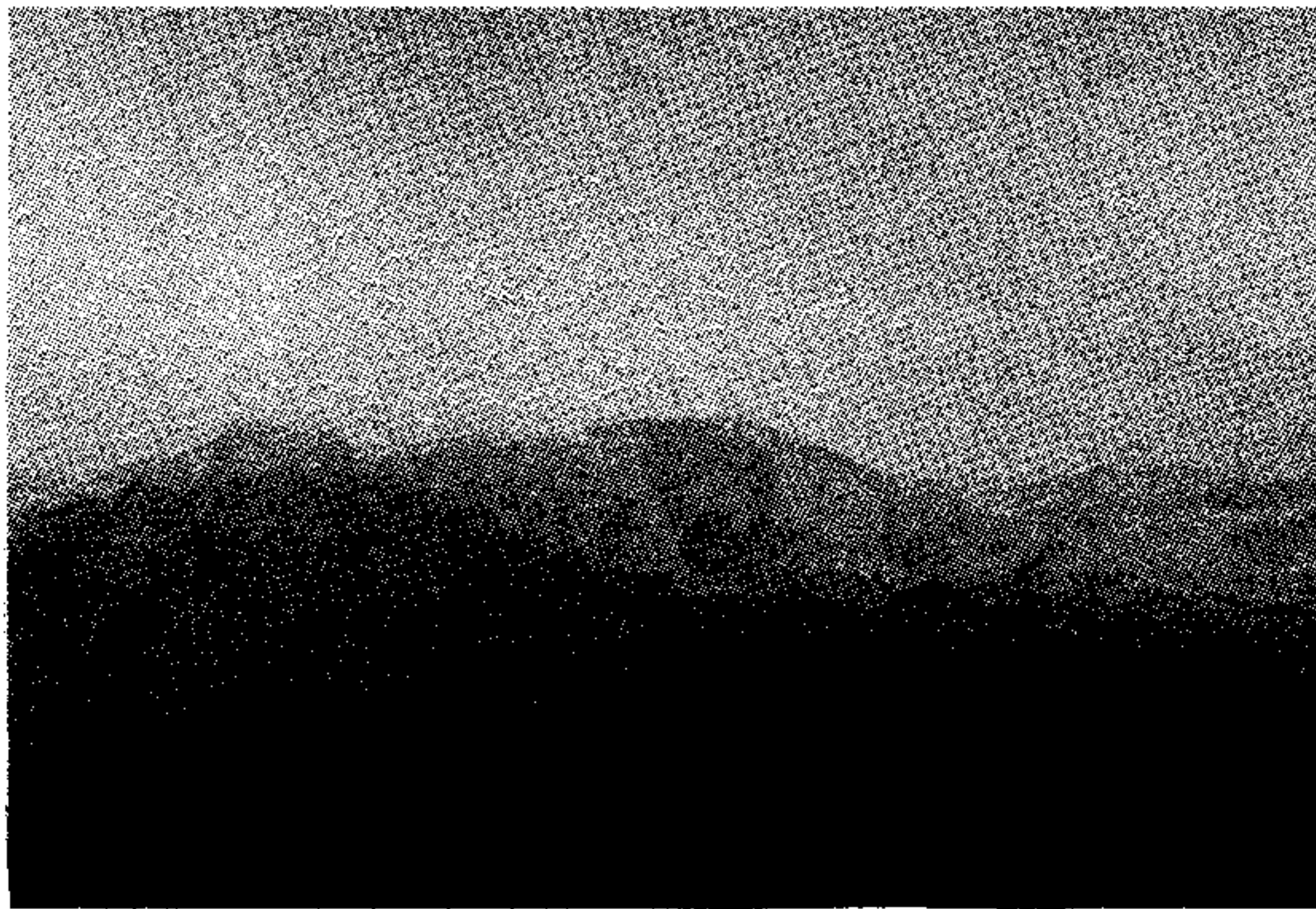
the followers of these tenets are called Bishnois (literally 'twenty-niners' in Hindi). The tenets were tailored to conserve bio-diversity of the area but also ensured a healthy eco-friendly social life for the community. Out of the 29 tenets, 10 are directed towards personal hygiene and maintaining good basic health, seven for healthy social behaviour, and five tenets to worship God. Eight tenets have been prescribed to preserve bio-diversity and encourage good animal husbandry. These include a ban on killing animals and felling green trees, and providing protection to all life

forms. The community is also directed to see that the firewood they use is devoid of small insects. Wearing blue clothes is prohibited because the dye for colouring them is obtained by cutting a large quantity of shrubs.

The Bishnois are presently spread over the

western parts of Rajasthan and parts of Haryana and Punjab. They are more prosperous than the other communities living in the Thar Desert, probably because of their eco-friendly lifestyle. Their villages are easily distinguishable with plenty of trees and other vegetation, and herds of antelopes roaming freely near their homes. The fields are ploughed with simple ploughs using bullocks or camels and this causes minimal damage to the fragile desert eco-system. Only one crop of bajra is grown during the monsoon season. The bushes which grow in the fields protect the loose sand from wind erosion and provide the much-needed fodder for animals during a famine.

The Bishnois keep only cows and buffaloes as rearing of sheep and goats, which devour desert vegetation, is taboo. Though they are Hindus, they do not burn their dead but



Fast-disappearing forests...



He's safe only in the zoo...

bury them to save precious wood and trees. They store water during the year in underground tanks by collecting rain water as it is precious in this dry desert area.

In 1737, when officials of the King of Jodhpur started felling a few khejri trees in Khejerli village, men, women and children hugged the trees that were being axed. In all, 363 Bishnois from Khejerli and adjoining villages sacrificed their lives. Later, hearing about it, the King of Jodhpur apologized for his action and issued a royal decree engraved on a copper plate, prohibiting the cutting of trees and hunting of animals in all Bishnoi villages. Violation of this order by anyone including the members of the ruling family would entail prosecution and a severe penalty. A temple and monument stand as testimony to the sacrifice of the 363 martyrs. Every year, the Bishnois assemble there to commemorate the extreme sacrifice made by their people to preserve their faith and religion.

The Bishnois aggressively protect the khejri trees and the antelopes, particularly the blackbuck and chinkara, even now. According to them, if a tree is saved from felling at the cost of one's head, it should be considered a good deed. They not only protect antelopes but also share their food and water with them. In a number of villages Bishnois hand-feed the animals.

The Bishnois immediately detect hunters who come to their villages and catch them. If the poachers escape leaving a dead antelope

in an agricultural field, the field owner will mourn its death like that of the passing on of a near or dear one and will not eat or drink water till the last rites are performed. On many occasions the Bishnois are injured and even killed by hunters but they fearlessly provide strict protection to the blackbuck and chinkara which fearlessly roam in their settlements. It's for this environmental awareness and commitment that Bishnois stand apart from the countless other sects and communities in India.

Hinduism and Eco-Religion

In ancient India, nature was regarded as God's most beautiful and precious creation. In fact, many plants and animals were worshipped for their services to humankind. Since water is regarded in many cultures as life-sustaining, its purity was preserved and several religious practices revolved round the use of water. Rivers, lakes and ponds were places sought to refresh the body and mind. Even today, a dip in the river on special religious occasions is regarded as an important event. Many religious fairs like the Kumbha Mela involve millions who take a dip in sacred rivers. But today the declining fresh water sources render such religious events unfeasible.

Hinduism in its pantheon of gods has a special place for nature with various gods and goddesses representing it. The wind god is the carrier of gentle, calm and cool breezy gusts soothing the body and mind. The forests host



Once upon a time they roamed about freely...

a variety of flora and fauna. All human settlements were carefully sited so as not to encroach upon forests. Ancient sages, seers and philosophers set up their religious centres in the forests, advocated nature worship and protection as a part of their philosophy. According to the Hindu philosophy, all elderly people should lead the last phase of their lives in the forests, in meditation and worship. Thus the forests served as ideal places for retirement and worship.

Agricultural lands are regarded as the gifts of Mother Earth and a part of the agricultural produce is offered to God during worship. The coconut tree and the cow are given a special place in most households and great care is taken to nurture them. The tulsi shrub is regarded as auspicious and grown in the front courtyard of many Hindu households. Flowers and leaves are used for worship. Even in big cities potted plants are used to select flowers for daily worship. Many plants have medicinal properties and some, used for curing common ailments, are found around the household. The banyan tree, the neem tree, and the mango grove are favourite spots for places of worship. These trees are therefore spared from being felled and offered protection.

The fishing community worship the sea as the goddess who provides them with the means for their livelihood and ensures their safe return from the sea. Several seashore temples and places of worship can be found even today. Thus Hinduism encompasses an eco-religion with a philosophy of protecting and nurturing nature including living creatures, the seas, forests, landscape and flora.

Buddhism and Jainism

The Buddha preached compassion for all beings and non-injury to all creatures, which

forms the basis of a Buddhist eco-religious philosophy. The careful and judicious use of environmental resources would be possible only if we inculcate the values of compassion and simplicity among people. The great waste generated by the materialistic consumption trends by people could be minimized if the values of simplicity and compassion could be ingrained in the future generations.

The eco-religious philosophy of Jainism has absolute non-violence at its core. It advocates both physical and verbal non-injury towards all beings. No animal is injured even if it lacks economic or aesthetic value. Thus environmental education for appreciation of all

life forms can be found in Buddhist and Jaina religious literature.

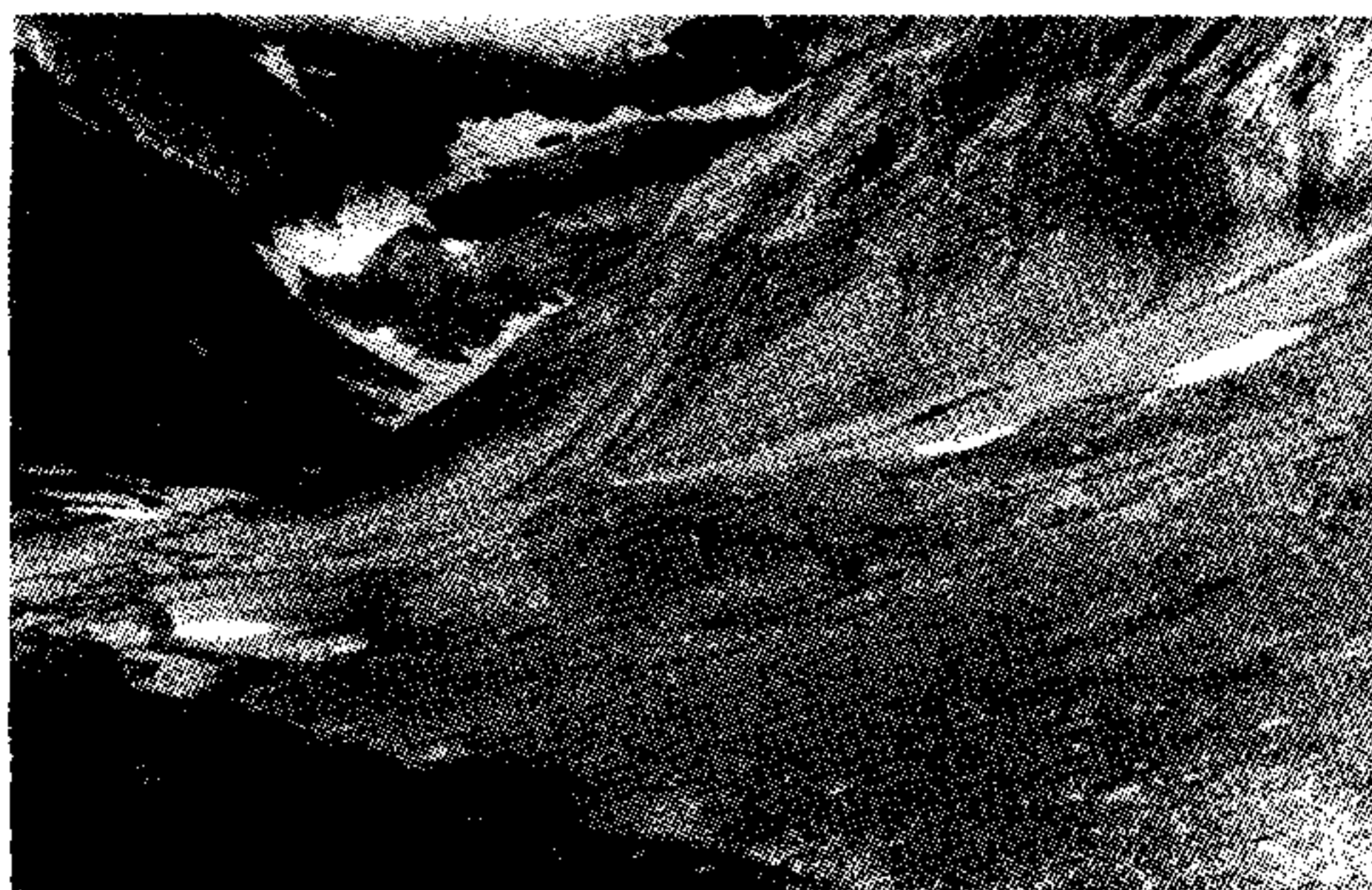
Christian

Eco-Religion

The preservation of the environment has been referred to even during the biblical times. When Noah faced floods of an unparalleled nature, endangering all species on earth, he took into his ark 'everything that creepeth upon the earth' according to God's direction. No animal was excluded from Noah's plan of protection because it lacked economic value. But apparently Noah did not think of the biological significance of plants in preserving environmental bio-diversity. This biblical incident is proof of the positive environmental strategies that were followed right from the time of creation (see *Genesis* 5.29-9.29).

Environmental Strategies and Policy Perspectives

Many developing countries have over the past decade created environmental ministries or boards and passed laws to check pollution. Economic development plans in such countries have largely overlooked the poor, thus forcing the marginalized to damage the



Deforestation means landslides...

natural resources in order to eke out a living. But a growing number of developing countries have realized that the key to economic progress should be ecologically sustainable, satisfying the basic needs of the underprivileged people. A significant development is that law and governments have begun to confront environmental threats to initiate strict regulatory and control measures for land, air, and water pollution, industrial pollution, workplace health hazards and toxic waste disposal.

The Greening Industry, the seventh report in the World Bank policy research series (1999)

is designed to bring the results of important new policy research to the attention of policy makers, programme administrators, and the wider development community. Developing countries are attempting to reduce industrial pollution by using the combined

power of local communities, regulatory measures, the print media to police air and water discharges from private companies and the stock markets. This new community-based approach is proving to be more effective in checking pollution than relying on traditional approaches to environmental regulation which is often under-funded, inefficient and corrupt.

Several grassroots people's movements have sprung up to protect the environment in a bid to conserve local resources. In the Himalayan hills of Uttaranchal, people collectively rose to defend the local interests against timber operations. Logging by contractors and private agencies has jeopardized ecological stability and reduced local people's opportunity to benefit from sound forest exploitation. The Chipko movement which originated in

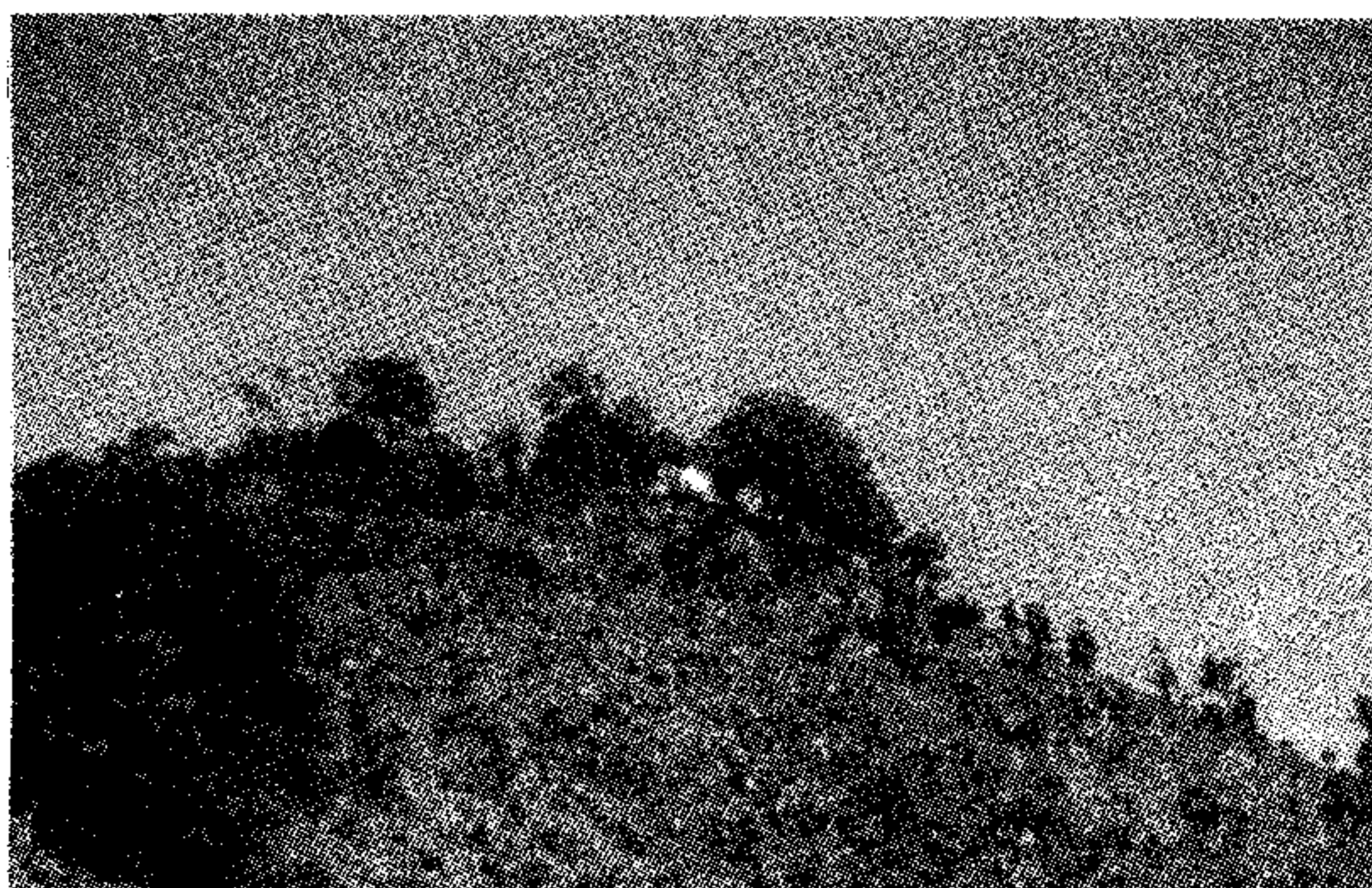
the hills of Uttaranchal was spearheaded by women who protected the trees from felling by hugging them [though these days the chief occupation of women here is to destroy trees! —Editor]. The Appiko movement similarly originated as a forest protection movement in Karnataka.

A fresh approach is to keep industrial pollution within acceptable bounds without hindering growth. In Indonesia, for example, the government has cut industrial water pollution sharply by monitoring industrial discharges and publicizing their findings in the mass media. Colombia and the Philippines

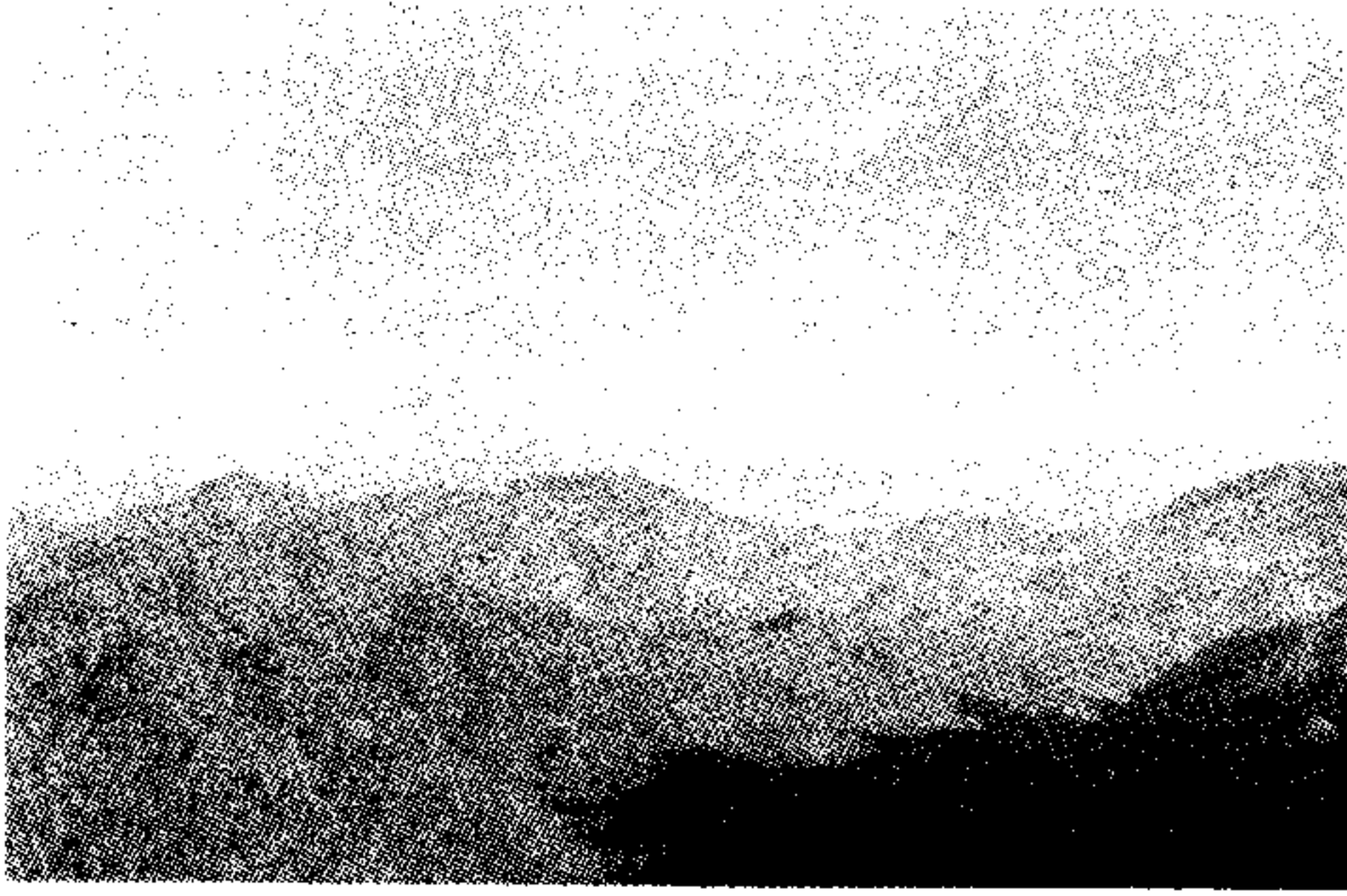
have recently achieved success in cleaning up their rivers and lakes by imposing charges on factories that pollute. China during the past two decades has used pollution charges and other measures to keep air and water pollution levels constant, even as eco-

nomic output has doubled. Similar programmes are either planned or underway in India.

At the national level, economic reforms can also reduce pollution. Greater openness to trade can spur commercial access to a cleaner technology. Cutting subsidies for raw materials can encourage companies to reduce waste. State-owned enterprises are often heavy polluters; so privatization can often stimulate cleaner production. Countries like China, India and Brazil have all demonstrated the power of such measures to reduce pollution. But all such measures are based on punitive grounds and do not instinctively appeal to the inner conscience of people. The desire for economic prosperity has propagated materialistic values, destroying spiritual values of simplicity, compassion and respect for all life forms.



The only occupation of hillwomen is deforestation...



The barren world...

Herein lies the scope of religion to advance environmental ethics and promote ecological values among people.

This new millennium brings hope of positive developments in eco-religion with more and more people realizing the significance of conserving the environment and preventing further deterioration of it. Policy choices should be broad-based, on a long-term perspective of the linkages between environment and development. The priority areas where religion can initiate action are summarized here:

To integrate religious leaders into various environmental programmes such as advising, planning, decision making, managing, and implementing. They have contact and are able to influence people by infusing environmental concepts and values into religion.

To establish and promote people's groups for collective environmental movements and action. Presently several Hindu religious associations like the Ramakrishna Mission and the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) regularly hold Vanamahotsavs (tree-plantation festivals) in schools, colleges and offices to inculcate the spirit of environmental conservation.



...and the green world

To give religious discourses stressing environmental importance.

To establish cross-cultural and inter-religious communication links to infuse environmental values and promote collective action among people.

To teach environmental ethics and values as a part of moral education sessions in schools and colleges.

To involve women in greater numbers in environmental programmes as they are primarily involved in shaping the culture and religious practices in the family.

To promote religious principles of non-injury, non-violence, charity and kindness for environmental protection.

To create new patterns of behaviour in society towards the environment through eco-religion.

To use religion to promote appreciation of the material and spiritual importance of a healthy natural environment.

A pollution and stress-free environment can promote more healthy and safe living for all creatures on earth. Religion will thus be a powerful and motivational force in creating widespread acceptance of a new eco-religion. □

It is maya which prevents the mind and senses from desiring to experience God, but a man who has realized Him has risen above all the chains and attractions of maya. Maya reveals her mysteries only to him who has gone beyond maya.

—Swami Brahmananda

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Maharaj, what is the meaning of *ekēśvara-vāda*?

To consider only one God or *Īśvara* as true and real is called *ekēśvara-vāda*. Christianity, Islam, and Brahmos follow this principle.

Following the path of dualism, can we follow the servant attitude with respect to God?

Why not? Certainly you can. The Vaiṣṇava scriptures have described five methods of sadhana. These are, the peaceful attitude (*śānta*), the servant attitude (*dāśya*), the friend attitude (*sakhya*), the parental attitude (*vātsalya*) and the beloved's attitude (*madhura*).

The peaceful attitude is like this: without assuming any personal relationship, one maintains the simple relationship of God-and-devotee with Him. This can be called the peaceful attitude. The servant attitude is to consider oneself as His servant like Hanuman did. The friend's attitude was seen in the cowherd boys of Vrindaban. The cowherd boys never knew that Krishna was divine. To them, he was a friend and so they jumped on him, played with him, and ate with him. The parental attitude is to consider God as one's child. The attitude of lover and beloved is to see the Lord as one's Beloved.

These apart, amongst the Śāktas there is the attitude of worshipping God as mother. To worship God as one's father also is there, but there is no mention of this in the Vaiṣṇava scriptures. To consider God as mother is the

speciality of the Śāktas. Nowhere is such an attitude seen other than here. Christians consider Mary as mother, but they do not say that Mary is an incarnation. Mary is like one who mediates between God and man. So the attitude of the Śāktas is unique.

Why is *māyā* called *aghaṭana-ghaṭana-paṭiyasi māyā*?

Māyā means *indrajāla*, magic. The deer behind which Rama had run is called *māyā-mṛga*. There is no golden deer, you see. The attraction of human beings for the world is *māyā*. This *māyā* extended its tentacles and made Rama run behind it. So what to speak of the common masses!

If *māyā* is impossible to overcome, how can we reach God?

*Sarva-dharmān parityajya
māmekam śaraṇam vraja;
Aham tvā sarva-pāpebhyo
mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.*

—Gītā, 18.66

The Lord has declared: 'Give up all do's and don'ts and think of Me.'

Are *māyā* and *moha* one and the same?
The meaning is the same.

What are *vidyā* and *avidyā* *māyās*?

Vidyā māyā takes you towards *mukti* while *avidyā māyā* binds you, makes you deluded. *Māyā* is nothing but falsification.

What is śūkṣma śarīra?

The subtle body is made of subtle elements. The five sense organs (*jñānendriyas*), five organs of action (*karmendriyas*), five vital forces (*prāṇas*), mind (*manas*) and intellect (*buddhi*)—the inner organ (*antaḥkāraṇa*) with these 17 elements is called the subtle body.

Maharaj, has anyone seen the causal body (kāraṇa śarīra)?

No, nobody has seen the causal body. The reason is, the subtle body or causal body cannot be seen by the gross eye.

Are the sun, moon and Hiranyagarbha manifestations of Śakti?

The sun, moon and Hiranyagarbha, all are coming from It or Him alone. Hiranyagarbha is an expression of Śakti itself. Hiranyagarbha is the earliest manifestation of power; that is, he who is the creator at the beginning of creation is Hiranyagarbha. His form is imagined to help meditation. He has golden-coloured hair, golden-coloured beard, even his nails are made of gold. All this is imagined to help meditation.

Maharaj, occasionally we see dreams about Sri Ramakrishna or other gods and goddesses. What value should we assign to them?

Can such things be measured? Anyway, dreams are untrue but the impression (*saṁskāra*) they leave behind is true. While good dreams leave behind good impressions, bad ones leave bad impressions. You saw in dream that you were practising somersaults. Does that mean you will wake up and practise somersaults? A girl told me she had received a mantra in dream. I said good. Then I thought I should ask her what she had received. 'What have you received?' I asked. She replied: 'Vrooom'. Does that mean she should repeat this 'mantra'? So remember, dreams are not true but the impressions they leave behind are true.

What are good dreams?

I told you. Those dreams which leave good impressions on the mind are good dreams.

'He who has fear will doubtless succeed.' This is a statement. What is its meaning?

You see, 'fear' means reverence. You must be conscious of your behaviour. That is, we should not do evil or whatever we like.

Maharaj, is the past of any help to us?

The past must make our lives noble. The experiences of the past teach us lessons.

What is the difference between self-control and austerity?

By self-control control of the mind is meant: to free the mind from all other thoughts. Austerity means enduring difficulties. Say for instance you feel hot while doing japa, but still you continue. I was pondering today, what a lot of time we spend in vain. I also remembered the incident of Sri Ramakrishna's marriage: he spent his time during his own marriage in singing *kirtans* and remembering God.

Maharaj, we ladies have to spend a lot of time in cooking...

Cooking is also work, and it is essential. Even sleep is necessary as it is essential for the body. But if you think of the rest of the time, you will see how much is being wasted. We spend time in discussing vain things, and we don't remember then that such precious moments will not return. Sri Ramakrishna says regarding someone that even though he is 50 years old he doesn't understand that he has to utilize his time fruitfully. He feels bored and so plays cards.

Who is a childlike person?

He whose thoughts and words are one, and whose actions are in harmony with his thoughts and words is a simple, childlike person (*sarala*). The reverse is complex nature.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Swami Smarananandaji is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited some of the Ramakrishna Order's centres in America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs. This is the sixth in the series.

On 20th May morning, we went to the nearby park and rose garden where roses were in full bloom. There were also varieties of cactuses. Museums with Moorish architecture are all around this area.

We left for Hollywood after breakfast. On the way we spent about an hour at Pasadena house, hallowed by Swami Vivekananda's 4-5-week-long stay. We reached Hollywood by 12 noon. In the afternoon, I had a long talk with Swami Swahananda about various aspects of our work in the US. Next day was the annual 'Sri Ramakrishna Dinner'. At 11 am, I spoke on Sri Ramakrishna to an audience of 300 people—three fourths of them Americans. After lunch, I had a brief meeting with ASTI (American Services to India) members. At 4 pm there was a question-answer session, which was attended by 40 people. Here I met a devotee by name Jayanta Mukherjee. He was known to me as a schoolboy while I was in Bombay some 45 years ago. Jayanta has settled down in the USA. He is now a US citizen. He wanted to

take me to the Grand Canyon. He came on Sunday evening and stayed overnight so that we could start in the morning. On Monday morning we took the flight to Las Vegas, from where we were to go to the Grand Canyon by Scenic Airlines. We were there around noon.



The author with Sri Jayanta Mukherjee at the Grand Canyon

After lunch in a hotel, the tourist company took us to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and thence to the West Rim.

An awesome spectacle indeed! The average height of South Rim is 7,000 ft above sea level, while at the North Rim, the height is 8,000 ft. The South Rim is open all through the year; the North Rim which is only 10 miles apart as the crow flies, is 215 miles away by road. This startling landscape, one of the natural wonders of the world, has been carved out by the Colorado river over several millions of years. It is an immense chasm, awe-inspiring, descending to 5,000 ft or more, straight to the bottom. It is the sheer visual impact of the landscape that impresses most people. Situated in an arid desert region, even at 7,000 ft it was quite hot. In winter the temperature drops



A view of the South Rim of the mighty Grand Canyon

to 0°F! Strangely enough, some peaks of the Grand Canyon have Indian names: Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Buddha and so on! Annually, this tourist spot attracts thousands of people. Some, in a feat of dare-devilry, go down the Canyon, walking or cycling on narrow ridges. Many accidents prove fatal, though park rescue teams do wonderful jobs of life-saving. Jayanta and myself returned to Hollywood via Las Vegas by 8.30 pm. Las Vegas is another funny place in the USA. It is the gambling capital of the United States! Situated in the midst of the desert, Las Vegas is endowed with riches earned through casinos. Round the year gambling-loving tourists crowd the place. Even the big airport provides 'gambling machines' on the lounge. If I tell people that I went to Las Vegas, they can't hide their smiles.

Next day, 23rd May, I had a leisurely time, though there was a question-answer session with the monastics in the morning for 1½

hours. I went with Swamis Swahananda and Sarvadevananda for lunch at the Convent, a stone's throw from the monastery. In the evening I spoke on 'The Message of the Upanishads' to an audience of 40-50 people.

SAN FRANCISCO

Next day, I left for San Francisco at 11 am. Swamis Prabuddhananda and Vedananda were at the airport. It was a quiet day. Even though it was chilly, with cold winds blowing, I went for a walk for about 45 minutes.

On 25th morning I had a long talk with Swami Prabuddhananda regarding our work in the West. In the afternoon we left for San Rafael which is beyond the Golden Gate bridge. A convent, with five nuns, is functioning there in a beautiful setting.

From there we went to Muir Woods Park, a charming reserve of coast redwoods, *Sequoia sempervirens*. Here, this canyon of redwoods was never logged, whereas in other parts of the coast in California and Oregon states most old-growth redwoods have been cut off. There are some very tall redwoods in Muir Woods, the tallest being 252 feet! Some are over 1,000 years old and most trees are 500 to 800 years old. The tallest redwood in the USA is 367.8 ft. This world's tallest living thing is in the Redwood National Park.

Next morning, at 11.30, I went to meet Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke), the scholar who has written *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* in six volumes. These apart, she has also written *Swami Trigunatita: His life and Work*. Her intense labour and facile pen have contributed these volumes of great historical value to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. She is young with all her 88 years, fiercely independent—cooking, dishwashing, reading, writing! *Sarvam paravaśam duḥkham*, dependence on others brings sorrow. Gargi follows this dictum, perhaps. Her devotion brings her to India every winter for two-three months' stay at Belur Math.

In the afternoon, we—Swami Prabuddhananda, myself, Dr Bhat,

Brahmachari Tyagisha-chaitanya, Vance, and others—left for Olema Retreat, which is 2,020 acres of forest and prairie land, and 1½ hours away. A big programme had been drawn up for the next four days at the retreat. Olema is an ideal place for a retreat. There are plenty of deer—some of them pure white. Accustomed to seeing people, they are not frightened on seeing us. They stand still and watch us.

Maintaining this huge property is an arduous task. Swami Prabuddhananda comes every Monday evening, gives classes to the retreatants on Tuesdays, and returns to San Francisco on Wednesday mornings.

On 27th morning, there was a youth programme. There were 40-50 boys and girls, all around 20 years old. About 80 devotees—elderly people—also attended the programme. A

few young people on the dais discussed human relations from their respective points of view. In the evening there was *arati* and music, both Indian and western, in the chapel.

BERKELEY

I left for Berkeley, 1½ hours away, on Sunday morning. Berkeley is a university town. The Berkeley University is famous all over the world. A good number of Indian students study here, and there are a

few professors from India, teaching in various faculties. The centre is small. Swami Aparananda is the Swami-in-charge. I spoke on 'Peace in Daily Life' before an audience of some 70 people. After lunch, by 3 pm, I had to be back at Olema to witness a play children titled 'The Message of the Bull.'

(to be continued)



Actors of 'The Message of the Bull' pose with the author

Do you find it difficult to concentrate?

Even amongst the spiritual aspirants who are more advanced, distractions arise during the hour of meditation. It is not merely true of you alone. You must therefore pray to God and keep watch over the vagaries of your mind. Also whenever the mind may wander about, whatever distracting thoughts may arise in the mind, learn to feel in all those distractions the all-pervading presence of your chosen ideal. Never be discouraged, but practise with perseverance. Through God's grace, when your mind becomes concentrated, samadhi is attained.

See no difference between guru and God. Have unswerving devotion to guru and God. To control the passions, to keep the body and mind pure, and to hold on to truth steadfastly are practices of brahmacharya.

God dwells in all. He is within your heart. Pray to him, weep before him, and you will find energy and strength. Your mind will come under control. Evil thoughts are to be driven away by good thoughts.

— Swami Premananda

Teaching Philosophy and Religion in India

DR ASHA MUKHERJEE

We conclude our series 'Popularizing Philosophy' with Dr Asha Mukherjee's views. Dr Asha Mukherjee is Reader, Department of Philosophy, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan.

The state of philosophy and comparative-religion teaching in India is really a matter of concern. Many talented students (best brains) are attracted towards careers in computer technology or natural sciences, and mediocre or even dull students are left for philosophy or comparative religion. But I know this has always been so with some exceptions. Philosophy and religion have always faced the crisis of want of good students. But at present we are facing another crisis—the crisis of students as such. The question of quality of the student does not arise anymore. The 'smart' generation even with less grey matter does not want to opt for core subjects like philosophy or comparative religion anymore. And due to this many colleges in this country are closing down their once prestigious departments. The West too is facing the problem for quite some time. But there is a difference. They have to raise their major part of funding through the courses offered. It is the student who has to pay heavily for the courses he opts for. A student normally would avoid courses that would not fetch him money in return. At the same time there is a class of students who opt for these courses because they are genuinely interested and do not care for the money they pay as fees. In the West, philosophy and religion do have at least some job market besides academics. But in India, till now most of the universities and some colleges are funded by the UGC (although there is a considerable number of state funded colleges). The UGC has been insisting that colleges and universities develop their own resources. One of the ways for this would be to ask the student to

pay for his courses. Since philosophy and religion don't have much job market, they would have almost no buyers. The big question is, if we do not have many buyers (or none), should we close down such departments? The answer is a clear no.

One basic reason for this answer is inherent in the nature of these subjects.

Philosophy and religion are both related with the basic understanding and way of life. If such subjects were closed down, a major part of intellectual enterprise would drop away from teaching and, in the future, we would have people with a piecemeal understanding of the life phenomena which would in turn lead to a chaotic social living and intellectual crisis. Philosophy as a discipline has a distinctive value. It helps in contemplating on all other forms of man's activities and experiences which are valued for their own sake and which contribute to his life as a cultured being. The modes of our being which are desired for their own sake are ultimate values. The main purpose of philosophy is the discovery of the criteria whereby the validity and/or worth of different forms of activities may be ascertained. Philosophy seeks to analyse and interpret various forms of activities and experiences. Logic, ethics, philosophy of religion and other branches of philosophy seek to improve the quality of human life and experience. But sciences try to explain the phenomena under investigation. Art, morality and religion constitute the mode of spiritual living, which is the subject of critical assessment by logic, epistemology, etc. In this sense philosophy may be regarded as the study of values, which is help-

ful for spiritual growth or advancement.

Philosophy is concerned with language and concepts, but only instrumentally. It is instrumental to whatever is intrinsically valuable: true knowledge and Truth. The subject matter of philosophy is conceptual or symbolic life of man, which is desired and valued for its own sake. Philosophy seeks to analyse the nature of scientific thinking, artistic creation, moral and religious virtues, etc with a view to determine the criteria of excellence. In this sense philosophy may be considered as an instrument of the qualitative improvement of man. Thus philosophy analyses and interprets the general forms of the value-bearing consciousness of man and thereby seeks to understand its own nature. Man creates, enjoys, lives a life, and indulges in arguments, reasons and assesses all spheres of life. The function of philosophy is to give a proper form and direction to the latter kind of activities. Philosophy is concerned to define an overall or ultimate purpose of man's value-producing activities and to assign a proper place to each of those activities with reference to that purpose. Thus the philosophical activity, as I view, has a two-fold function, critical and constructive. On the one hand it seeks to explore the inconsistencies and inadequacies of certain approaches to facts and values; on the other, it attempts to formulate new and satisfactory positions, which may be called the synthesizing function of philosophy.

Man is constantly looking for new possibilities of realizing the highest values in life. Ideally it should be the business of philosophy to give a direction to this quest. Different religions offer different conceptions of the religious man, but the centre of all religions is the moral man. Philosophical reflections on the conceptions and descriptions try to discover the essential core of agreement underlying differences due to environmental and cultural factors. The concept of God is the concept of perfection, which constitutes the goal of human life. The Moslem God, the Christian God, the God of Vaishnavas and the Buddhist Nir-

vana are all concerned with the goal of human life. The forms of mystic and devotional consciousness including rituals and worship also have striking similarities and far-reaching resemblance. In a country like India where people of different religious faiths have lived for centuries, it is all the more important that we have a clear understanding of the religious experiences and realities to avoid conflicts and to avoid politicians' exploitation of people's sentiments. Although it is true that the masses subscribe to certain beliefs concerning God and follow certain modes of worship, teaching religion may help people to be able to detach themselves from the lower order of values and live a life with the felt presence of a supreme Being in all human beings. A truly rational approach to religion would lead to a religious consciousness, excluding all extraneous elements and studying it in its most essential forms and manifestations without missing the concrete, vital reality of the lived religion.

To come back to the question of why at all we need to teach philosophy and religion.

The aim of teaching is not only to produce good entrepreneurs but also good human beings and rational beings. Man in the modern world faces a constant crisis at the level of the unconscious which chiefly concerns the lives of individuals. This is due to not being able to visualize or imagine the end for which they should live. One needs to aspire for higher and higher models of worthy existence. Philosophy and religion, both are meant to help attaining this goal.

Therefore we must teach these core subjects. Now, the question would be, 'Do we need to modify our method and content of teaching?'

We must make some changes in the present state of philosophy and religion teaching so as to make it more attractive to today's 'smart' generation and to popularize it specially among the youth. The question is how to go about it.

Before I try to answer this question, I would like to discuss the present scenario of

philosophy and religion teaching in the country. It is widely maintained that philosophical output does not match the quantity and quality of effort that goes into philosophical education across the country. There are various reasons:

(1) The curriculum is mostly not competitive and is outdated.

(2) The curriculum does not suit the temperament of the fresh entrants to philosophy.

(3) We cannot hope to train more than a small fraction of students for academic jobs.

(4) Our curriculum hardly has a place for advanced preparation in teaching philosophy for those who have philosophical aptitude.

(5) In India normally there is a tendency to include unmanageable horizontal spread of topics but hardly do we get any chance to go into depth.

(6) The curricula do not allow any freedom to pursue various special interests so as to encourage a wider audience from different disciplines, eg, science students, foreign students, senior academicians and administrators, etc.

(7) Both philosophy and religion may be approached from a variety of theoretical and empirical directions. In recent times the need for such studies has been felt due to obvious reasons. The need for interdisciplinary study is being felt more and more in recent times. Perhaps the philosophy department is the most suitable one to prepare and motivate the students for such studies at the advanced level.

(8) Unless we get really motivated students, the quality of research at the PhD level cannot be improved. Special attention needs to be paid

to such research work.

(9) Religion now is a highly specialized discipline. It can no more be treated as a part of philosophy curriculum. In India there are very few departments where religion is taught as a full course and even in those departments where it is taught the curriculum is completely outdated and it does not attract good students.

(10) Philosophy forms a very restricted part of school education and knowledge of technical philosophy is hardly present in the general culture to which these students are exposed.

Suggestions:

The teaching of philosophy ought to begin from the knowledge and experience of the school-level students. The curriculum must have room for acquiring some general skills so that the student can branch off to some non-academic jobs as well, eg jobs in media, NGO sectors, administrative jobs, etc. We need to identify these skills in the philosophy curriculum (analytical skills, cultural awareness and philosophical problems, etc). At least part of the faculty and students should be linked to advanced research to promote new thinking on classical and emerging issues in philosophy. Classical Indian and western philosophy should be de-emphasized while studies in Indian philosophy and issues of western philosophy at the cutting edge should be encouraged. Indian and western philosophy should be made to come in contact with recent advances. The curriculum should allow freedom to pursue various special interests to encourage a wider audience from different disciplines. □

The Goal of Philosophy

The aim of all sciences, philosophies, and religions is to discover the eternal truth which is called in Sanskrit *satyam*. That eternal truth is the ideal of all philosophers, scientists, and great thinkers of the world. Religions are but so many attempts of the human mind to discover that eternal truth, that eternal wisdom.

—Swami Abhedananda

Medieval Bengali Saints and Vaiṣṇavism

PROF RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

Sri Ranjit Kumar Acharjee is a retired reader in philosophy at the Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashahar, Tripura, and member of senate, Tripura University. Sri Acharjee's scholarly articles and reviews have been enlightening our readers down the years. In this article, Sri Acharjee studies the impact of Bengali Vaiṣṇava religious poets and their poetry. The artwork is presented by Kumari Shubhra Nag, a budding artist from Lucknow.

Preface

Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, also known as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, was a vibrant and dominant religious movement of Bengal during the 15th and 16th centuries with Śrī Caitanya as the central figure. But Caitanya was not the sole originator of this massive movement and faith. As a matter of fact, the genesis and development of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal can be traced to various sources which account for the flowering and vitality of this religious faith. Even before the advent of Caitanya, some literary, social and religious factors could be discerned in the cultural landscape of Bengal, which replenished and vitalized this particular religious faith. The pre-Caitanya poets of Bengal, especially Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Caṇḍidāsa through their poetical compositions prepared the fertile ground in which Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is rooted. So the contribution of the medieval Bengali literature to the growth and development of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal is undoubtedly considerable and significant.

During the Sena period, the Vaiṣṇava religion with its highly emotional fervour found a secure footing in Bengal. The Kṛṣṇa saga was

very popular, and the cult of Rādhā was well-known in Bengal—upon which the superstructure of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism stands. Lakṣmaṇa Sena himself composed some beautiful and eloquent verses on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legend in Sanskrit, which described the divine sports of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Ācārya Govardhana, one of his court poets, also wrote some such poems.

Jayadeva's Works

The *Gita Govinda*, a great creative work of exquisite literary embellishment, surcharged with the intensity of erotic emotions, enjoys a position of great importance in the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. Its author is Jayadeva, the most illustrious court poet of the Sena king Lakṣmaṇa Sena, who flourished in Bengal towards the end of the 12th century. The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legend—the eternally fascinating love-story of young Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā—has been presented by him in the most absorbing manner. Jayadeva along with Caṇḍidāsa, Vidyāpati and Mālādhara popularized this episode through their poetical works. To the devout Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, Jayadeva is an orthodox Vaiṣṇava and the *Gita Govinda* a great work on Vaiṣṇava bhakti. In the absence of any authentic account, the his-



Caitanya

toricity of this claim cannot be determined beyond doubt. It is equally difficult to say if his motivation in composing the *Gita Govinda* was purely literary or predominantly devotional.

The literary excellence of the work is almost universally acclaimed. It is a 'unique poem in the literature of the world,' says Dr S.K. De, the renowned Vaiṣṇavism scholar. He is also of the opinion that the *Gita Govinda* should be taken as a 'deliberate work of art,' and it is unlikely that a gifted poet like Jayadeva could have 'composed any religious treatise according to particular Vaiṣṇava dogmatics.'

Dr De also argues that Jayadeva's devotion to Kṛṣṇa had nothing to do with poetry.

The Caitanyite Vaiṣṇavas, as already alluded to above, regard it as a masterpiece of religious literature, displaying devotional sentiment at its zenith. Some scholars argue that *Gita Govinda* symbolizes the eternal love of human souls for the supremely beloved Kṛṣṇa. The scholar observes:

In the celestial song, the poet has probably exhibited the sentiment of love with an allegorical explanation of divine philosophy and the spiritual yearning of the devotees to unite with the Divine.

Dr R.C. Majumdar, however, classed it as erotic literature in view of the abundance of erotic elements in it, especially in its twelfth canto. The most reasonable view seems to be that Jayadeva's Vaiṣṇava predilections notwithstanding, he was essentially a poet and his chief concern was probably to compose lyric

poetry (*kāvya*) depicting the divine love between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and that too in the language of earthly passions and cravings most commonly used by the human beings.

The Source of *Gita Govinda*: It is difficult to trace the source of *Gita Govinda*. A close study of the *Gita Govinda* makes it abundantly clear that *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* could not have been the basis of the work. Dr S.K. De observes:

The prominence given to Rādhā in the *Gita Govinda* makes it probable that the source of Jayadeva's inspiration could not have been the Kṛṣṇa-Gopī legend of the *Bhāgavata*, which avoids all direct mention of Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa's consort, and which speaks of autumnal, and not vernal, *rāsa-līlā*.

However, some parallelisms might be drawn between the treatment of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love episode by Jayadeva on the one hand and that of the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* on the other. And consequently some scholars are inclined to believe that the said *Purāṇa* was the principal source of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. Some similarities between the two notwithstanding, significant disparities cannot be brushed



While Jayadeva bathes,
Kṛṣṇa writes in his guise...

aside. Evidently, certain similarities cannot conclusively prove Jayadeva's indebtedness to the aforesaid *Purāṇa*. The Nimbārkite influence on Jayadeva also cannot be established beyond reasonable doubt, though the Nimbārkas offer an exalted position to Rādhā in their thought and worship. A close study of the Purāṇic literature and Tamil tradition makes it sufficiently clear that the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legend was quite current in those days

and it may be reasonably assumed that *Gīta Govinda*, along with the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* and the Nimbārka sect, inherited the erotic mysticism centering around the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legend from a common source, whose identity cannot now be ascertained.

The existence of such an unknown source, different from the *Bhāgavata*, is not to be ruled out, for even during Caitanya's time, when the *Bhāgavata* emotionalism was fully established, there are evidences as to the existence of a different kind of Vaiṣṇava devotionism which did not conform to the *Bhāgavata* ideals.

Whatever might be its source, it is an undisputed fact that this magnificent lyrical work captivated the imagination of commoners and devotees alike, and taught them the way of expressing devotional feelings in the language of love. This apart, the *Gīta Govinda* exerted tremendous influence in moulding the devotional emotionalism of Caitanya in later years. By now, it is fairly well-known that Caitanya, during his Nīlācala days, would often enter into mystic trance when the *Gīta Govinda* was recited before him upon his own request.

Caṇḍidāsa's Works

In the pre-Caitanya era, Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa of Bengal and Vidyāpati of Mithilā were the other two important literary luminaries who were instrumental in popularizing the ideals of divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Bengal, thus preparing the ground for the out-flowering of Caitanyite Vaiṣṇavism in subsequent years. Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa is said to be the author of *Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Kīrtana*. He flourished probably between 1400-1500 AD. Dr R.C. Majumdar says:

As a matter of fact, the exact time when Caṇḍidāsa flourished is not known either. All that we know is that Caitanya (1486-1533) used to find pleasure in singing or reading poems of Caṇḍidāsa, that they were sung to him as a sort of devotional exercise. Caṇḍidāsa was thus a predecessor (or may be an elder contemporary) of Caitanya; in that case his date may be about AD 1450.



Candidasa

In the medieval literary history of Bengal, the presence of at least three Caṇḍidāsas—Dviḍa, Baḍu, and Dīna—poses a problem of grave complexity. Scholars are engaged in an intricate debate on the issue, which obviously does not fall within the purview of our present discussion. For our purpose, we should remember that a very gifted poet named Caṇḍidāsa (Baḍu) composed some good poems and a work on the Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā episode, which was titled *Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Kīrtana* by its learned editor, Sri Basanta Ranjan Roy.

The story of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love narrated in *Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Kīrtana* is certainly pre-Caitanya in spirit and sentiment. There is genuine lyrical quality in many passages in this work. The influence of Jayadeva on Caṇḍidāsa is evidenced by the fact that the latter included in his work translations of two songs from *Gīta Govinda* besides some other passages, which show clear imitations of that work. Though

there are certain similarities between these two works, Caṇḍidāsa allowed his creative imagination an unfettered liberty in delineating Kṛṣṇa's character in a manner which seems to be repugnant to man's devotional sentiment and which again does not conform to the accounts given in the classical sources of Kṛṣṇa's life, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Hari-varṇśa*, and the *Bhāgavata*.

Caṇḍidāsa's Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are more human than divine, and their love is portrayed in the most sensuous terms. This has made some scholars dub the work as bad. Of course Caṇḍidāsa composed some devotional lyrics displaying highly elevated religious sentiment and mystical love, which despised everything vile and sensuous. Assuredly, these were the poems which moved Caitanya emotionally in later years and made him feel the pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Mālādhara's Works

Mālādhara Basu, another Bengali poet, who flourished immediately before Caitanya, composed the *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijaya*, a poem based on the *Bhāgavata*. His work is a Bengali translation of the *Bhāgavata* and chiefly dwells upon the divine activities of Kṛṣṇa without accepting the divinity of Rādhā. As a matter of fact, he laid no emphasis on Rādhā. The aforesaid work was read and sung in Bengal during the lifetime of Caitanya. The expression '*vasudeva-suta kṛṣṇa mor prāṇanātha*, Vasudeva's son Kṛṣṇa is the lord of my life' exerted considerable influence on Caitanya. He had profound love and regard for Mālādhara for his deep religious predilections. Caitanya highly commended it to Mālādhara's son during their meeting at Nilācala.

Vidyāpati's Works

Another poet of eminence, who played an important role in popularizing Rādhā-

Kṛṣṇa love songs in Bengal, was Vidyāpati of Mithilā. In medieval times, there were close cultural ties between Bengal and Mithilā. And the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa songs composed by Vidyāpati in a dialect called *brajaboli* soon became very popular in Bengal. From an enquiry into the relevant facts, it is presumed that Vidyāpati had been influenced by Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*. Be that as it may, the extensive popularity which his Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa songs enjoyed in Bengal was mainly due to Caitanya, who used to appreciate and sing them.

Vidyāpati is believed to have lived between 1350 and 1450 AD. His religious beliefs are a matter of controversy. What we wish to point out is that, though the passionate romantic poems and songs of these poets on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love theme profoundly influenced the religious sentiments of Caitanya, the spirit of post-Caitanya bhakti, the niceties of *gopi-prema* and Rādhā as the *hlādinī śakti* were unknown to these poets. And these are the features which were developed by the Caitanyite Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal and Vaiṣṇava apostles of Vrindaban. □



Vidyapati

The man of true devotion yearns for God without becoming impatient. Even if he sees no light he will not give up his devotions. Only those who love God like shopkeepers looking for profit will give up if their prayers are not answered promptly.

—Swami Brahmananda

Swami Vivekananda's Spiritual Humanism

PRAVRAJIKA GAYATRIPRANA

Pravrajika Gayatriprana is a nun of the convent in San Francisco, USA. This wonderful article about Swamiji's spiritual humanism has been adapted from a lecture she gave at the Vedanta Society of Northern California last year.

Spiritual humanism is, I believe, a fundamental teaching of Swami Vivekananda. However, I don't think that Swami Vivekananda himself used the term spiritual humanism. Rather, he lived and taught its reality and left it to us to understand what it means and how it affects our way of thinking and living our lives.

On the face of it, the term spiritual humanism is paradoxical. We can understand why when we take into account the standard definitions of the words *humanism* and *spiritual*. We find that humanism is concerned with distinctly human interests or ideals, especially as contrasted with religious interests, while spirituality pertains to sacred or religious things and not to temporal things. Human beings are, by such a definition, completely hedged in by time, while the domain of spirituality is timelessness. Again, humanism is associated with the idea of the value of the individual—pragmatism, self-effort and improvement, democracy, and human interrelatedness, and solidarity. Spirituality generally brings in ideas of idealism, transcending the limitations of the human condition, adherence to a more or less authoritarian tradition, surrender to a higher power, and the ultimate unreality of what religious people usually refer to as 'the world'. In short, humanism is *this-worldly* and spirituality is *other-worldly*. From this standpoint, humanism and spiritual are words belonging to

different domains.

In view of all this, how did Swami Vivekananda manage to arrive at the idea of spiritual humanism? The fundamental answer to this question is that he worked it out during his four and a half years with Sri Ramakrishna. However, this synthesis did not occur in a vacuum, for the whole of history up to that point may be said to have been a dialectic on the relationship between the this-worldly and other-worldly aspects of humanity. Let's take a moment to study the history behind both humanism and spirituality and set the stage for the drama of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. If we go back to the first records of human culture we find, in the West, the Jewish scriptures with their deep interest in the human situation as it unfolded in the lives of their founding fathers and mothers. These titanic and colourful personalities were intensely involved with God, whom they thought of as a much greater and higher being than themselves, but nevertheless as a human being with whom they engaged in a long and often stormy dialogue. A very human view of reality. Earlier, the anonymous Vedic rishis of India discovered, through intense introspection, the pure principle common to all individuals. The nature of that principle was truth, peace and beauty and it could only be experienced by mental and often physical withdrawal from the concrete,



explicit, storm-tossed world. This was, I think, the epitome of what we tend to think of as spiritual, and it is definitely quite the opposite of the early Jewish heritage which has had such an impact on our western way of thinking.

As these two ideals worked themselves out historically, we find the Jewish tradition emphasizing human greatness, ethics and social justice. The Vedic tradition, by contrast, focused on the primacy of the Spirit, the absolute necessity of yoga to experience it, and personal holiness. In that way the baseline for western 'this-worldliness' and Vedantic 'otherworldliness' was set, something like 4000 years ago.

However, nothing in this world is cast in concrete, and both the western and Indian traditions underwent a number of changes. Some 2,500 years ago Plato's philosophy introduced into the West a much more impersonal idea of the divine principle. In course of time this philosophy got married, as it were, to Judaism, producing Christianity, an uneasy mix of its father's spiritual idealism and the warm human concern of its Jewish mother. In India at the same time the Buddha's revolution led to a deeper concern for the human individual, with a resulting flowering of science, art, politics and philosophy, all organized around the traditional spiritual values of ultimate self-transcendence. The only snag was that the Buddha was perceived as denying an ultimate Reality which would give a depth dimension to the human endeavours of his religion.

At the beginning of the medieval period, some 1,500 years ago, the internal strains of Christianity and Buddhism were becoming apparent and there was a swing in both India and the West, back to more conservative views. Muhammad reasserted a monotheistic God with absolute powers, while Sri Shankara reconstructed human beings as the pure principle. In some ways the Middle Ages was a period of intense struggle between these traditional views and the urge to explore and develop its opposite which had been given a

chance to express itself in Christianity and Buddhism. In the course of this battle, the traditional view became very entrenched leading, in the West, to the five hundred years of the Inquisition and, in India, to a return to profound subjectivity and mysticism.

The reaction to medievalism took the form, in the West, of the growth of natural science which accepted no dogmas and steadily worked to balance excessive emphasis on a 'God out there' whose fiats—as far as recent history went—were rather horrendous and destructive of human dignity. Around the same time, India immersed herself in a riot of spiritual technology, developing new and often outlandish methods of realizing the Spirit that were readily accessible to the ordinary people, especially the women and labouring classes, who had been all but shut out from mainstream Hinduism for two millennia.

By Sri Ramakrishna's time, both of these movements had worked themselves into caricatures of their original intent. In the West the criterion of reality had become, in line with the natural sciences, concrete facts of the physical world—a notion not only worked up by the French thinker August Comte, but actually turned into a religion. This viewpoint was known as positivism and its effect, as Swami Vivekananda later remarked, was to almost totally destroy [the idea of] God.¹ In India, the fascination for the interior world of exotic spiritual experience had gone so far that, as Swami Vivekananda said, 'The Hindus lack in realistic observation,'² so super-refined and sensitive had they become. The upshot of these two extreme positions was that India had been overrun and subjugated by the aggressive West while westerners themselves craved the interiority and 'power of abstrac-

1. Swami Vivekananda, 'Introduction to Jnana-Yoga' in *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 6, p. 41. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

2. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 106.

tion' in which, according to Swami Vivekananda, the Hindus excelled.³

The movement towards these two more or less dead-end positions had, in their turn, given rise to new approaches which ran alongside the mainstream and were largely hidden by it. In the West a sort of mystical humanism emerged some 400 years ago in the German mystic Boehme, and was processed into a philosophy by the German Romantic philosophers who, in turn, found a voice in our own Ralph Waldo Emerson. He in his first flush of enthusiasm, went so far as to announce, in his epochal Divinity School Address: 'Man is an infinite Soul...drinking forever the soul of God'—an idea straight from the Upanishads, for which he was banished from the intellectual mainstream of America for the rest of his life. In 16th century India, teachers like Kabir more and more expressed spirituality in terms of the human individual and his or her everyday concerns, setting a trend which culminated in the 19th century in the person of Rammohan Roy, a devout Hindu, but one who was determined to bring the Indian tradition in line with the standards of western involvement with human individuals and efficiency in promoting their welfare in the modern world. Among many major works, he launched the Brahmo Samaj which, though ostracized by orthodox Hindus, worked towards greater social justice and a more rationalized form of Hinduism. It was from the ranks of this organization that several of Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciples, including Narendranath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda, emerged.

All of this points to a definite move, in the West, towards spirituality, and in India, towards humanism. The problem was that the West really had no idea how to make spirituality alive and active in human society, while India had not developed the means to *apply* principles in the world of mind and matter. The upshot of these two situations was that the

West, dominated by scientific positivism, was groping for spirituality and was unable to digest and use what she was finding intellectually; while India, in thrall to 'bewildering Yogi-ism',⁴ as Swami Vivekananda put it, was hampered by her inability to actualize the down-to-earth methods she saw in her all too effective western conquerors.

This is the context in which Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda, met each other, interacted, and finally produced the relationship of spirituality and humanity we are discussing tonight.

One could say that Narendranath, or Naren for short, was the embodiment of western style rationality, even positivism or the emphasis on this material world and its doings, while Sri Ramakrishna was a living encyclopedia of the spiritual experience of India. Though, according to Sri Ramakrishna, Naren was a great spiritual personality, he had identified himself thoroughly with western rationalism and positivism and lined up his massive energy and intelligence behind that position. That unexpected situation (by traditional standards, at least) we may say now was probably to prepare himself for the great task of modernizing India which Sri Ramakrishna was to lay on his shoulders in due course. From the other side, Sri Ramakrishna's total embodiment of spirituality was a reservoir from which the West was shortly to be flooded through the sluice gates of Vivekananda. The meeting of the two men was, therefore, like two tectonic plates crunching together.

In our context, what was interesting about Naren's initial impression of Sri Ramakrishna was his fascination with his human personality. Despite what seemed to Naren to be Sri Ramakrishna's primitive devotion to the Goddess which repelled his positivistic mind, Sri Ramakrishna nevertheless radiated such human genuineness, affection and downright effectiveness that Naren was captivated. His

3. Ibid., pp. 105.

4. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 105.

mind, however, was baffled. How could a person, so steeped in Hindu medievalism, be such a glorious vindication of the ideal of humanism? One could say, from one standpoint, that their whole relationship was the working out of the answer to that question.

Sri Ramakrishna's first response was very direct and much more than Naren had bargained for. Touching the young man on the chest he plunged him, through his tremendous spiritual power, into what we now call an altered state of consciousness. This, however, was not just any altered state of consciousness, but a direct experience of Spirit such as the Vedic rishis had had. Through this experience Naren discovered, to his amazement, that 'religion can be *given*; ...one touch, one glance, can change a whole life.'⁵ From his westernized, positivistic standpoint, however, Naren was quite unprepared for this experience and saw it as an annihilation of himself and the world he had been living in up till then. He was completely shattered by this first experience with Sri Ramakrishna and stayed away from Dakshineswar until the human attraction for the Master got the better of him again and brought him back.

The experience, however, did not shake Naren's capacity to be thoroughly rational and to think things through in a humanistic way. He later told Sister Nivedita that what he learned from this experience was that 'he had learnt to count our consciousness as a very small thing'⁶—by which, of course, he meant our ordinary, everyday consciousness and its preoccupations with food, computers, the stock market report, and so on. Thus was his allegiance to positivism cut at the root and a challenge given to rethink what human being means.

A basic question that would tend to arise in such a situation is: granted that there is a

vast, spiritual dimension to humanity—which Naren at that point could not deny—how can we connect up in a consistent way our physical, idiosyncratic, all too this-worldly and infinitely varied, positivistic selves with that as yet unknown and unmanifested vastness?

What Sri Ramakrishna conveyed to Narendra on this score was the transforming power of *conviction*. So intense was his vision of the Spirit in each and every human being that he would become totally merged in the superconscious state, not only at the mention of the great spiritual teachers of this world, not only on meeting an utterly sincere and devoted devotee, but also at the casual sight of a young English boy leaning nonchalantly against a tree in a public park in Calcutta. The boy's pose reminded the Master of Sri Krishna and thus triggered samadhi. But, at the same time, the boy was one of the ruling British imperialists and his pose was actually an assertion of his arrogant, secular way of thinking. That Sri Ramakrishna nevertheless saw and experienced him as pure Spirit is a testimony to the power of his ideal of spiritual humanism, which we may be sure was not lost on Naren's awakened and seeking mind.

Despite such forward movement under the inspiration of Sri Ramakrishna, there still remained another question: what is it that connects up Spirit and humanity? Is there a *principle* we can work with that helps us to pull through some of the difficult situations we are bound to come across in spiritualizing our relationship with others? Another episode at Dakshineswar provided a clue to the answer. One day a rather conceited and crabby devotee arrived from outside Calcutta to test Sri Ramakrishna and find out if he was 'the genuine article'. After cross-questioning the Master quite rudely he went off into meditation, apparently not at all satisfied with Sri Ramakrishna's performance. Naren was singing and the whole roomful of devotees was silent and still. Sri Ramakrishna's watchful eyes noticed that the harmful rays of the setting sun were falling on his abstracted visitor and he at

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 179.

6. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 1263.

once got up silently and deftly opened an umbrella to protect his body. When Naren and the other devotees later questioned Sri Ramakrishna about this episode, he smilingly told them, 'It is God Himself who sports in the world as vidya and avidya.'⁷ Here he was entering on delicate ground with Narendra who, up till then, had rejected the idea of the Goddess as a primitive and debasing idea. However, in the light of all that had gone between himself and Sri Ramakrishna up to that point it seems likely that Narendra was now able to understand Sri Ramakrishna's position: Spirit is not only a tremendous, abstract principle, it is also a *power* which makes itself manifest in concrete forms, including even the unattractive and the difficult-to-deal-with. This was Sri Ramakrishna's Divine Mother to whom he offered the same respect in whatever and whomever he met, humbling himself to the ground, if need be, to make Her content and happy. Sri Ramakrishna's behaviour was a dynamic demonstration, not only of how the ideal of Spirit transfigures how we see people, but also of how a respectful and loving attitude to everyone makes Spirit a living and dynamic reality, a 'tiger in our tank' in our battle to spiritualize our world.

All this was very good. Naren's mind became quieter for a while, but it was not to remain so for very long. As Sri Ramakrishna began to succumb to his throat cancer, the devotees began to assert that he was a divine incarnation, no doubt to drown their own rising doubts and fears. Such an idea was a red rag to the bull of Naren's deep-seated humanism. A divine incarnation! None of this medievalism! We are not going to put up with supernatural mysteries and all the abracadabra that goes with it! He became increasingly aggressive to the devotees and, at times, downright rude, even to Sri Ramakrishna. What he objected to was the idea that 'all

humans are equal, but some are more equal than others' to paraphrase George Orwell's famous phrase.

Sri Ramakrishna's response to all this was, 'If you see anywhere a special manifestation of God's Power, you may know that God has incarnated Himself there.'⁸ This was a very general, rational statement, making no extravagant or exclusive claims; and, of course, it was perfectly consistent with all that the Master had already told Naren about the manifestation of divine power in forms of varying degrees of refinement and ability to demonstrate spirituality. Quite simply, some people manifest Spirit more fully and powerfully than others. This is no different, from the everyday standpoint, than saying that some people are taller than others. However, Spirit cannot be parcelled up into clearly divided parts. Rather, it is always the same; and what varies is the degree to which individuals have worked on themselves to become perfect vehicles for the manifestation of the Spirit. Naren seems to have picked up this hint in terms of human evolution, for around this time he remarked,

We think of [the Master] as a person who is like God. ... There is a point between the vegetable creation and the animal creation where it is very difficult to determine whether a particular thing is a vegetable or an animal. Likewise, there is a stage between the man-world and the God-world where it is extremely hard to say whether a person is a man or God.⁹

From this standpoint, the term divine incarnation means the missing link in an evolutionary series from ordinary humanity to Spirit itself. Sri Ramakrishna's contribution here was: When the elephant—a manifestation of the divine—is charging towards you, you must listen to the driver's shout to get out of the way. This, too, is a manifestation of the Divine—but a better manifestation, because it repre-

7. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 528. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]

8. *Gospel*, p. 851.

9. *Gospel*, p. 904.

sents pure Mind and Intelligence.¹⁰

Here was the key to what Sri Ramakrishna meant by *divine incarnation*: when you see someone radiating divine Intelligence through an immaculately pure mind, that is the human prototype, the complete human being, the role model by which to spiritualize your life. That was what had captivated and held Naren through all his battles with the Master, the pole star by which he had navigated to the understanding that made him now acquiesce with Sri Ramakrishna's remark, 'I see that all things—everything that exists—have come from this' (meaning himself).¹¹ What a change from his original idea of Sri Ramakrishna as an ignorant, primitive shaman! The beauty of this change of view is that it came about through a clear-cut process of human dialogue in which no claim was ever made that anyone was intrinsically superior to anyone else, or that anyone is helplessly dependent on a divine incarnation. Such an idea deprives humanity of its incentive to self-improvement, in the view of Swami Vivekananda. The idea behind Sri Ramakrishna's teaching was: we all have the same spiritual potential. What varies is the degree to which we realize it and manifest it in our lives. Sri Ramakrishna and souls of his type are demonstrations of what human beings can become, provided the concept is clear and the effort to realize it is correct and sustained. Here we arrive at a whole new dimension of what the word human means.

But that is not all. Naren had one more step to go. Just before Sri Ramakrishna passed away, he asserted to the still questioning young man: 'He who was Rama and Krishna [Hindu incarnations of God, who are assumed to have been historical human beings] has now actually become Ramakrishna, but not in your Vedantic sense!'¹² By this he meant that his affinity with Rama and Krishna was not sim-

ply as another mirage on the ocean of Reality; it was something much more concrete than that; and he proceeded, a few days later, to demonstrate how such a strange thing could occur. Going into samadhi along with Naren, he removed from him forever any trace of a limited, individual identity, from which Naren emerged completely invested with Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual power and ability to see the whole picture of Reality, not only cosmically, but in every molecule, organism, human being of the universe. The fully expanded consciousness of the Master was transplanted, as it were, into Naren, demonstrating that humanity, at its highest levels of development, operates in ways that are radically beyond our ordinary understanding and can bring about events which fall within what is known as 'non-locality' in the language of contemporary science. And this was not a temporary thing; it was a genetic transplant, as it were, which activated Swami Vivekananda and invested him with the tremendous truth-power with which he put in mighty levers to turn around not only the traditions of India but also those of the West.

All of this has been an overview of what spiritual humanism can mean at its very core. Swami Vivekananda's ongoing task was to put it into language so easy and simple that 'even a child may grasp it'¹³ and to beam it out to East and West. As I mentioned, the projects of these two recipients of Swami Vivekananda's message were rather different on account of their different histories, though both focused on the same problems. It was natural, then, that he would present the idea of spiritual humanism rather differently in East and West. In a general way, he emphasized humanism in traditionally 'spiritual' India, and spirituality in the resolutely humanistic West. I shall concentrate here on the western approach, as most of us are western or living long-term in the West, with the issue uppermost in our minds: how to spiritualize

10. *Gospel*, p. 853.

11. *Gospel*, p. 945.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 411.

13. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 105.

our very secular, mundane and indecently individualistic lives? I shall, therefore, wind up with a brief overview of how Swami Vivekananda 'took on' the West in order to spiritualize its reigning ideal of humanism.

He began, at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago of 1893, by asserting that human individuality—that icon of western life—need not and should not be tied merely to our physical bodies and ordinary minds. The truth is, he said, that every human being has an 'infinite universal individuality.'¹⁴ Could this be his way of expressing what he experienced when Sri Ramakrishna touched him and sent him off to his first samadhi? Swami Vivekananda also made no bones about the fact that 'to gain this...individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go'¹⁵—what he himself had discovered with such a jolt at his early encounter with Sri Ramakrishna.

On the assumption that the West was hopelessly non-spiritual one might think that such high-flown ideas would fall on deaf ears; but we already know that the thousands of people packing the hall were hanging on his every word and had risen as a body to acclaim him at his very first appearance at the Parliament. Although the idea of the divine in man was in the air in the West, western people had not as yet actually seen a person in whom this truth was a living, dynamic reality, talking and interacting with individuals in a very natural and friendly way. The West was still firmly convinced that the physical world of concrete, material things is *really* real; but at the same time, it was longing to find something much more expansive and all-inclusive which would bring lasting peace and happiness. However, its early attempts to connect up the world of Spirit were all too this-worldly, as the ubiquitous seances and table-rappings of the Spiritualists attested. Swami Vivekananda frankly told those who were serious about living Spiritual Humanism, 'Instead of mate-

rialising the spirit, that is, dragging the spiritual to the material as these folks do, convert the matter into spirit, catch a glimpse at least, every day, of that world of infinite beauty and peace and purity—the spiritual, and try to live in it day and night.'¹⁶ This injunction was typical of Swami Vivekananda's approach: he laid the responsibility on the individual to work out the implications of spiritual humanism in their own 'laboratory' and to find, through their own efforts, the truth he himself had grasped at his first samadhi.

As Swami Vivekananda assumed more formally the mantle of the spiritual teacher in the West and began his exposition of yoga, the subject of spiritual humanism took the form: 'The soul is God and every human being has perfect divinity within him [or herself]; and each ... must show his [or her] divinity sooner or later.'¹⁷ Here we find, in a more or less formal way, the conviction that the human soul is, ultimately, God—an idea established in the Upanishads, transmitted and amplified through Sri Shankaracharya's teaching and now, in the hands of Swami Vivekananda, becoming a call to a process of active and conscious self-transformation in our everyday world. As Sri Ramakrishna's intense conviction of human divinity had inspired Naren to find the meeting point of Spirit and humanity, Swami Vivekananda thundered at his western audiences,

The millennium exists already for those who find it. The truth is, we have lost ourselves and think the world to be lost. 'Fool! Hearest not thou? In thine own heart, day and night, is singing that Eternal Music—Sachchidananda, Soham, Soham, (Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss, I am He, I am He)!'¹⁸

For those who were serious about this yoga, he would tolerate no namby-pambyism. His idea was: If you are Spirit, why should you be weak, vacillating, with your mind crammed

14. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 14.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 262.

17. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 333.

18. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 33.

with half-baked ideas or even no ideas at all? To climb to the second rung of the ladder of spiritual humanism you must be completely convinced of your own divinity and ready to lay down your life for it—and that, not necessarily in big, dramatic gestures, but what the Christians call ‘the way of the cross’, the daily grind of ego rubbing on ego, of external failures, betrayals and all the rest. No matter what, the yoga of spiritual humanism is to march on and on to the goal, ever asserting, ‘I am It, I am He, I am She, I am the All, I am the Universe’ and never giving in to what is euphemistically called the *human condition*.

As his work gained momentum and he had to face many intellectual questions—from some of the sharpest and best trained minds in the West. Swami Vivekananda took up the challenge of explaining just *how* the Spirit can be seen in so many forms, many of them very ‘ordinary’ and ‘humble’. He told the distinguished members of the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University,

In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present. The worm form is the lower form in which the divinity has been more overshadowed by Maya; that is the highest form in which it has been least overshadowed.¹⁹

Here we find the assertion of the divinity of all beings—not just human—and the introduction of the principle of maya, the power which mysteriously makes us see things as ‘different’. However, for Swami Vivekananda the fact is, if we can rise above our habit of segregating people and things into ‘higher and lower’, ‘good and bad’, etc we move into a realm where every being is unique and glorious in its, his or her own way, and much to be loved. For those who were serious about putting the divisive power of maya behind them and developing the ability to respect and revere the divine in all, Swami Vivekananda said,

Everything that is strong, good and power-

ful ... in human nature is the outcome of [human] divinity; and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike divine. ... Therefore the Vedanta lays down that each man should be treated not as what he manifests, but as what he stands for. Each human being stands for the divine, and, therefore, every teacher should be helpful, not by condemning man, but by helping him to call forth the divinity that is within him.²⁰

Here is the deep respect and love for *all* forms of the Infinite that Swami Vivekananda had seen in Sri Ramakrishna and knew to be the only way to build up spiritual humanism in the lives of every individual.

As Swami Vivekananda’s audiences absorbed these ideas, they said to him, ‘Swamiji, these ideas are wonderful. But how can they be *practical*?’ To which he gave the response, ‘Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha.’²¹ This is a stunning idea, but not what we usually think of as ‘practical’. However, Swami Vivekananda’s theme in the West was, ever and always, the power of ideas and principles to transmute life and to evolve higher and higher states of being if we commit ourselves to them and become suitable vehicles for their manifestation. The unfamiliar meaning of *practical* was brought out and amplified by Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and mystic. He remarked, ‘Our reason considers psychical realities as mere abstractions—such as God—for which there can be no physical evidence. But if you have the psychical *experience*, if the psychical fact forces itself upon you, then you understand it and it becomes a *fact*.’²² Jung considered the capacity to ‘concretize any conclusion or abstraction—to make it almost audible or visual, that one can almost

19. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 364.

20. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 388.

21. *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, p. 307.

22. Sonu Shamdasani, C.G. Jung: *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 56.

touch' the genius of the eastern mind and one that the West is yet to develop, though he was convinced that every human being, whether eastern or western, has the capacity to do so.²³

We can say, in the context of the story of Sri Ramakrishna and Naren, that Naren himself went through this evolution. At first he saw Sri Ramakrishna as a mere shaman; but at the fourth stage of the dialogue was able to see the Master as pure, intelligent Principle from which the entire universe was radiating. It is the tremendous power of such realized ideals that alone gives us the strength to stand above the limitations of our temperament, personality, shadow, and all that besets us in our minute to minute living.

I believe that this was the practicality of which Swami Vivekananda was speaking in the West and its application in terms of spiritual humanism is this: if we are talking about the evolution of humanity to Spirit, far and away the most practical thing is to open ourselves up completely to the truest, noblest and highest ideas and facts and make ourselves ready to be transmuted by their power into Christs and Buddhas, the high-water mark of spiritual humanity.

In the same vein he gave one of his rare public talks on Sri Ramakrishna, in which he emphasized the tremendous support Sri Ramakrishna had received from the tradition in which he developed as a human being. The Vedantic tradition had concretized concepts in the way we have just discussed and was consciously geared to the evolution of the highest human types and ideals.²⁴ Historically it had provided innumerable institutions and incentives to that end in India. The implication seems to be that it is high time for the West to start working on creating such a culture, from which Ramakrishnas and Vivekanandas will emerge in due course, and that not occasionally, but in large numbers. Quite a different meaning of 'practical', don't you think? Cer-

tainly one that lays on all of us the urgent need to make Vedantic ideas living, breathing and supremely effective in changing our culture root and branch.

Thus far, as I have been tracing Swami Vivekananda's teachings on spiritual humanism I have tried to show how they resonate with what he himself learned from Sri Ramakrishna. As we have been going along, the subject is becoming more and more subtle, more and more all-encompassing, as did Sri Ramakrishna's instructions to Naren. We have now reached the climax of the whole line of thought. I hope you remember how, at the end of his life, Sri Ramakrishna transferred, as it were, his ideal and its power to Swami Vivekananda. Did Swami Vivekananda go so far as that in his teaching on spiritual humanism? In answer, let us contemplate what he told an audience here in San Francisco in April of 1900:

Vedanta teaches the God that is in everyone, has become everyone and everything. ... There is a chance of Vedanta becoming the religion of this country because of democracy. But it can become so only if you can and do clearly understand it, if you become real men and women, not people with vague ideas and superstitions in your brains and if you want to be really spiritual.²⁵

Here Swami Vivekananda is challenging us to introduce into our unique, humanistic institution of democracy the ideal of human divinity, the fundamental basis for the equality of human beings. This brings to its conclusion the steady convergence of humanism and spirituality which we are tracing. But, if we are to accomplish this we must, as he says, be thoroughly prepared for it. Are we ready? Can we get behind some of the images he projected here in San Francisco of what, in the last analysis, spiritual humanism means?

Immortality is knowing ourselves as one with all, living in all bodies, perceiving through all minds. We are bound to feel in other bodies

23. Ibid.

24. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 161-2.

25. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 125-6.

than this one. ... What is sympathy? Is there any limit to this sympathy, this feeling in our bodies? It is quite possible that the time will come when I shall feel through the whole universe.²⁶

This, of course, is only possible when we have learned how to experience the ideal as living, far more living than anything we know at present. As and when we do so we shall

come to that consciousness of the identity of everything and let man see himself in everything. ... I am the universal: stand upon that and ever worship the Highest through the highest form, for God is a Spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth.²⁷

Here Swami Vivekananda is handing over to us the very core of the Vedanta he received from Sri Ramakrishna. When one touches this level of human consciousness one becomes, like Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, 'all things to all people', accepting them as they are, serving them unselfishly, loving them unconditionally, never seeing them as anything but pure, radiant Spirit, and always and ever, knowing them as our very

own selves. This is the acme of spiritual humanism, the only way to resolve the tremendous clashes of our contemporary world. And, in order to attain to this, we need no special equipment. All that is needed is the commitment to the ideal and determination to work it out to its logical conclusion.

Recently we saw a newspaper clipping informing us that all over India people believe that San Francisco is the spiritual centre of the contemporary world. Our first reaction was to laugh, but then we remembered what was said here 100 years ago, what was lived here by Swami Vivekananda, the voice of Vedanta to the West. We are the direct inheritors of this message. Are we ready to keep it alive, to make it glow and to beam it out, the worship of the living God, who has thus far been ignorantly called *humanity*?²⁸ □

26. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 129-30.

27. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 341.

28. Adapted from *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 349.

You Are Indeed Fortunate!

Those who are guileless and devoted to truth, self-controlled, and lovers of God, are the living gods, the rishis and siddhas even though they wear human bodies. Know that it is the infinite grace of God that you can meditate on the form of Sri Ramakrishna. I tell you what I have known all my life. As you meditate on Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother, you will receive all that is needed for your spiritual unfoldment. The saviour of the fallen, Sri Ramakrishna, took a human body for our sake; he is still living in a spiritual body, blessing eager and yearning souls. And he reveals himself to many who call on him with an earnest heart. Being indifferent to pleasure and pain, meditate with an undivided mind on Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. The Lord is the witness, the fulfiller of the wishes of his devotees. He thinks of our welfare more than we. That is why I say he will do everything needed for your spiritual unfoldment. Have no fear. Only look to him day and night, and pray and weep. The only way to receive love and devotion is by the means of truth and purity. Be pure. Increase your faith and devotion and you will get everything. You will become perfect.

—Swami Premananda

Meditations on Madhu Vidya

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

We are serializing these meditations, based on Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj's talks on Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (Chapter 2)

THE TWELFTH MEDITATION

इदं सत्यं सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्य सत्यस्य सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु; यद्वायमस्मिन्सत्ये तेजोम-योऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, यद्वायमध्यात्मं सात्यस्तेजोम-योऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, अयमेव स योऽयमात्मा; इदममृतम्, इदं ब्रह्म, इदं सर्वम् ॥२.५.१२॥

This truth is (like) honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this truth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this truth, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul of the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul of each; He indeed is the Self of all. He is all.

This mantra is quite confusing. It is about satya or truth.

THE THIRTEENTH MEDITATION

इदं मानुषं सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्य मानुषस्य सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु; यद्वायमस्मिन्मानुषे तेजोम-योऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, यद्वायमध्यात्मं मानुषस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, अयमेव स योऽयमात्मा; इदममृतम्, इदं ब्रह्म, इदं सर्वम् ॥२.५.१३॥

This race of men is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this race of men. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this race of men, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul in each; He indeed is the Self in all. He is all.

If California is divided someday, as some movements like it, northern Californians would say: 'We are superior Californians.' And southern Californians would say: 'We are superior.' Let's now think of the entire nation. We feel identified with it and say: 'We are Americans.' This consciousness comes to us.

This consciousness is the source of joy. When I limit myself to California, I was born in California, I love this state. I am proud to identify myself with my people. But if I become a little broad, I identify myself as American. A little more broad, and I picture myself as the citizen of the world. I shall then think of the whole of humanity. There are some people, poets for instance, who visualize future citizens too. The broader we are, the richer our experience. When we identify ourselves with the whole of humanity—past and present—our experience will be richer. So humanity as a whole is a rich concept and experience. People of old, people today, and people to come in the future, all could become one with us when we identify ourselves with the whole of humanity. These ideas are for our contemplation.

We have to think of the whole of the human species. Though people of the past are gone, the future people are yet to arrive, the human species is alive. This is a living entity. It has a soul. To contemplate on this aspect is, says our Upaniṣad, honey. This meditation is relevant and very important in the present-day context because our modern problem is the problem of man, of how human beings can live together on this globe. We have to examine the thread of unity running through the entire human race. This thread of unity gives humanity a soul. This meditation is not an imagination because there is a spiritual entity within each one of us. There is a supreme Entity behind all of us. That infinite Self is the ground of everything. The relation between the individual and the cosmic is one of honey (*madhu*).

Swami Vivekananda's Passing...

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

Swami Ashokananda was one of the illustrious monks of the Ramakrishna Sangha. He was Swami Vivekananda's disciple, Swamiji having initiated him posthumously in a vision. He became one of the greatest editors of Prabuddha Bharata, and even personalities like Mahatma Gandhiji admired his writings. He did pioneering work in San Francisco, USA. This month, when the world remembers the sad passing of Swami Vivekananda almost a hundred years ago, we publish Swami Ashokanandaji's memoirs of that day.

While he was in the West, Swami Vivekananda felt that the time had come to turn over to others the responsibility of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and to resign the presidency. Because of legal delays, however, he could not resign until 12 February 1901, at which time Swami Brahmananda was elected president—an office he was to hold for the rest of his life.

Yet as long as Swamiji lived it was he who supervised the affairs of the Order and in every respect looked after the training of the monks. Though formally president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Brahmananda deferred to the leadership of his beloved 'elder brother' until the last.

Swami Brahmananda was not in the Math on the evening of 4 July 1902, when Swami Vivekananda suddenly died. He had gone to Calcutta with Swami Saradananda on business, and they received the word there. When they reached Belur late that night, Swami Brahmananda was so paralyzed by grief that he had a hard time getting off the boat; even to walk he had to be supported. He went upstairs to Swamiji's room, and there he began to cry. He could not be consoled. He just fell on Swamiji, and afterwards, when they lifted him up, he said, 'It is as if the whole Himalaya Mountains have disappeared from before my eyes!'

The next morning, before Swamiji's body

was cremated, the monks all came, as is the custom, and offered flowers at his feet. As Swami Brahmananda worshipped him, he put his head on Swamiji's feet and again wept inconsolably. This was a bitter moment in his life. Swamiji was so young—only thirty-nine—and suddenly gone.

Swami Brahmananda was always reluctant to give expression to what was deep in his heart; and in the years that followed he only rarely spoke about Swamiji. Once he remarked to some devotees: 'You are so happy to see me—how much happier you would have been if you had seen Swamiji!' Another day he told a devotee, 'Everything about Swamiji was unusual and strange. He was the embodiment of transcendental consciousness, and it was not always easy to go near him. At other times he would become the nearest of the near. We could never measure the depth of his love. ... Everything he did, he did impelled by love. We are trying to play the music which he composed, but that also not rightly.'

The monks had never dreamed that Swamiji would pass away when the work was just beginning, and it took a long time for them to adjust to being without him. I have heard from a monk who joined the Order in 1909 that even then there were signs of the storm of grief that had passed over the monastery at the death of Swami Vivekananda. □

Lion Amongst Lambs

Sophoniscus of Athens had a son, and he is the hero of our story. An exceptional hero he was. He fought all his life: first as a soldier, then as a truth-seeker, later as a lawyer, and finally as a moral policeman. He was killed.

Let's read our hero as the warrior first. Those were the days of the Potidaea campaign. Athens had to fight a powerful enemy. Soldiers were recruited by the hundred. Our hero too was one amongst them. The war dragged on for days. Athenians were not to give up so easily. They fought bravely. Our hero too fought valiantly. When the great Alcibiades of Athens was about to fall, our hero simply thrust himself into the forefront and struck lethal blows on the enemy. Alcibiades was saved. In time, the nobleman Alcibiades was to become a great admirer and disciple of his own little soldier.

Wars were fought in plenty in those days. Our hero participated in two more wars at least: one at Delium and the other at Amphipolis. Whoever won isn't of much consequence; but that our hero shone like the sun in these wars is important. Due to this, he could have shot up in rank and profile like a meteorite. He could have made much hay as the sun shone very brightly for him.

But no, he withdrew. He began wearing rags. He preferred rags to riches. He walked barefoot. He never cared whether he was poor or well-off. In fact, he earned fame as the most wretchedly dressed man in Athens. And who was he? Socrates!

Whatever happened to the hero, Socrates, who fought so bravely? Did he become a monk? Not at all. He married twice. When the first wife died, he was compelled to marry again. He had two sons from his first wife, Myrtone, and one from his second, Xanthippe.

'Cool' is too soft a word to describe our hero's concern for his family. He cared little for the world. So something had happened to him.

That something was the sudden awakening of the spirit within. A lion can't adjust with lambs; it can't thrive on grass. Conventional life is for the mediocre. The ordinary run has its own way: A few gods to throw flowers on, a few silly conventions, and then inertia—this is all the religion and philosophy the world knows. The world prefers sleep, though imagining that it's fully awake. Whenever an awakener comes and tries to rouse it, he is punished for having done so.

After the war hero, we study the truth-seeker now. Socrates had been nominated as one of the councillors of the city. A few military officials were sued on charges of dubious fidelity, and they were treacherously arrested by their rivals. Horrible stories were told about them. People believed their stories. All wanted their execution. The verdict too came: the military leaders were to be hanged.

Socrates was pained. He knew those officers were innocent. How could such a calumny have spread against them? So he alone stood against the verdict. He struggled hard to prove their innocence. Justice prevailed, and the officers were set free. Socrates earned numerous enemies owing to this move. But he cared little.

Socrates was drawn more and more to *sophia* than petty bickerings. To him, knowledge is in the self. It is not in vain practices or vain worship. It is not in trickery, in mathematics, in astronomy or even in immoral ideas and ideologies. Socrates called himself a 'midwife', trying to bring the original out of the human mind. He attracted the young specially. He told them not to waste their time in

worldliness, but to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of truth. He would never preach. He had no school. He had no philosophy. All he wanted was: 'Know Thyself'. He would ask questions and seek answers from the youth. He did not want them to believe things. He wanted them to question. That would make them think. They would think about the fundamental principles governing nature.

However, his enemies did not leave him in peace. They fought an intellectual war. Aristophanes was inspired by the splinter group to present a wonderful caricature of this hero in *The Clouds*, a satire. Socrates was presented in it as a madman, trying to make the younger generation disbelievers. Meanwhile, Socrates had to face another crisis.

Athens came under the rule of The Thirty—the thirty tyrants who manipulated power for their own personal gain. Tyrants are tyrants. They can't appreciate any breath of dissent. Consequently, there were numerous arrests, secret murders, etc. Socrates was immensely pained at these developments. Only once did he protest. That was when he himself was told to make some treacherous arrests. He said no. Though he was popular all over Athens, his admirers feared that he may have to pay the price for his refusal. They advised hiding but he brushed that idea away. Please remember: He was a hero! Providence came to Socrates' help then. People were weary of this rule. There was a great uprising. The tyrants were overtaken, and there was peace. Socrates was saved.

We finally come to Socrates as a moral policeman. This time the culprit was he himself. Unable to tolerate his popularity, and unable to make over to the new way of life he wished people to, Athenians revolted against truth. He was accused of turning the heads of the young and ignoring the local deities. That is, he was accused of disturbing the slumber of the world. Socrates was charmed with his accusers—so wonderfully had they worked their way through to make him a culprit!

The court heard the accusers and, finally,

decided that Socrates must be punished. One of his admirers, Lysias, prepared a beautiful speech in defence of Socrates and gave it to him. But Socrates declined to use it because, according to him, a man of knowledge should be broad and magnanimous; he should depend more on God than on the human being. He only told the jury that what his accusers said was false.

'Will you stop maligning our gods and distracting our children?' asked the jury. Their questioning was only an eyewash. Socrates said: 'I shall never stop inspiring the young to lead noble lives.'

The punishment was announced: death penalty. His admirers were shell-shocked but Socrates was cool as ever. He was asked if he preferred any alternative punishment. Socrates said: 'I want you to treat me like a normal human being.'

The jury laughed aloud. 'How much penalty money are you ready to pay?' someone asked mockingly. Socrates said: 'One mina.' 'One mina?' the jury roared with laughter. But the jury were furious also. They thought Socrates was mocking justice. 'Death by hemlock' was the verdict.

His disciples wept. His admirers wept. Everyone around wept. Socrates was at peace. He was jailed. He stayed there in peace.

On the day of his punishment, he went to bathe and did not return till evening. What he did at the lonely place no one knew. He sent away the women because they would weep. He had lead a hero's life all through, and did not want any display of weakness during his farewell. At last they gave him the cup containing hemlock. Socrates drank. He was told to walk for the poison to take effect. He did. He sank slowly. He sank into history.

Society wanted Socrates to bow down to it. He did not. Vivekananda has remarked that truth will never bow down to society; society will have to bow down to truth or die. Philosophic Athens died a slow death, and it is only in the books now. □

Book Reviews

HINDUISM, THE ETERNAL DHARMA: By Swami Mukhyananda. Published by the author from Centre for Reshaping Our Worldview, Kolkata. Available at Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014. 2000. Pp. 181. Rs.100.

We have a good number of books on Hinduism, tracing the multifarious sources from which Hinduism developed in the hoary past, and elucidating its multi-dimensional facets and unique features authored by competent scholars and researchers. But the book under review (a revised second edition) is distinctive in its presentation of the structural framework of Hinduism. The revered swamiji, its author, is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order since 1943 and has served the Order in various capacities. The present treatise is the fruit of his deep and penetrating study.

The work is divided into several convenient chapters. Chapter III, which is subdivided into two parts, elucidates the *Śruti* (truths) and *Śmṛti* (dharma) portions of Hinduism, highlighting the universal and eternal spiritual principles on which its structure is based. The author's perspicacious formulation of a 'modified version of *varṇāśrama-dharma* capable of being adapted by all mankind...though in the early stages birth was sanctified by character and occupations determined the caste,' is a commendable attempt. The learned swamiji has shown quite clearly how dharma or applied truths form the bases of the devout Hindu's life. In the numerous Appendices to the present work, attempts have been made to present the multi-dimensional Hinduism in its total perspective, its philosophical foundation and also to establish Hinduism as an integrated system, covering all aspects of human life—intellectual, emotional, practical, social, and spiritual.

A detailed and comprehensive treatment of all the features of an ancient and variegated composite religion as Hinduism cannot be expected from a book of this volume, and the author himself does not advance such a claim. He remarks: 'It has been conceived to acquaint the general reader in a brief compass with some of the fundamental features of Hinduism in its total perspective, showing their mutual interconnection and coherence in the whole scheme.' The methodology adopted by the learned author is mainly evolutionary and historical, and in certain places comparative.

The learned swamiji has succeeded in his endeavor to a great extent. Admittedly, it is not a scholarly account of Hinduism, meant for scholars and academicians, nor can it be regarded as a textbook of Hinduism. Nevertheless, it is a nice book, rich in content, broad in analysis, coherent in presentation and relevant to the present situation. The theme has been developed within the conceptual framework of Advaita Vedanta. It appears to be a thought-provoking study.

Hinduism is not a closed system; it is a living and dynamic religion. It is not indifferent to practical and social needs of mankind. In recent years, when religious fanaticism and mad communalism have been vitiating our national life and weakening the fabric of social solidarity, when wild claims and counter-claims are being advanced in the name of religion, it is very essential that the real import and implications of religion are understood in their proper perspective. The reviewer wishes that the present work be closely studied by every serious individual, not excluding scholars and thinkers. It is recommended that the book should find place in the shelf of every library. The paper, printing, and binding are quite up to the mark. Fifty percent of the sale proceeds of this book will go to the Ramakrishna Mission's Swami Vivekananda Ancestral Home Project Fund.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO HINDU CULTURE (ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL): By Swami Harshananda. Published by Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560019. 1998. Pp. xii+172. Rs.40.

At the very beginning of his book Swami Harshananda narrates the story of a Hindu student studying in England who is said to have blurted out: 'What is *Bhagavadgita*?' when his English professor asked him to explain a difficult passage from it. The ignorance of even highly educated Hindus about their own culture and religion is indeed a matter of shame for us. We should be grateful to the present author for having written a short compendium of Hindu culture in all its aspects.

Culture, as the swamiji says, is the refinement

of our whole personality, and if an acquaintance with the lofty ideals and achievements of our ancestors can prevent, even to a small extent, the widespread downward slide of our society, especially in its upper echelons, towards crass consumerism, alcoholism, addiction to drugs and sexual promiscuity, then the book will have achieved its purpose.

In this book there is not only an accurate and adequate delineation of Hindu philosophy and religion, sciences and scholarship, fine arts and music, language, literature and performing arts, but also a good deal of information about the material bases of culture, viz, the structure of Hindu society and its political institutions, including the judicial system and the facts of Hindu economy.

Our ancestors were far from being totally other-worldly. All through our history we had 'expansive trade and commerce, well-organized trade-guilds, a good coinage system and sensible taxation laws' (p. 58). Those who wielded political and economic power were restrained from being tyrannical by the elevated principles of dharma which were designed to promote social harmony and the well-being of every stratum of society.

Swami Harshananda reminds us that the contemporary culture of India is influenced by Islam and Christianity and by the modern secular West. We cannot simply ignore these elements in our culture. But what we urgently need is a renewed interest in the doctrines of our ancient cultural texts. In the Upanishads there is continuous reference to *tapas* or austerity. The Hindus never repudiated material pursuits; we must certainly try to raise the standard of living, especially of our downtrodden and poverty-stricken masses. But we should also lay emphasis on intense and single-minded pursuit of self-knowledge if matter is not to debase and deprive us. Great things can be achieved by great sacrifices only, as Swami Vivekananda puts it (p. 148). In the core of Hindu culture is the clarion call to give up *kama* and *kanchana* (lust and greed) and it is this core which is represented by the greatest living exemplar of Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna.

A sympathetic understanding of Hindu culture will show how we can be of this world, enjoying all the comforts that contemporary science and technology can offer us, without being bound and downgraded by matter. We must also learn how to sacrifice these comforts to achieve spiritual greatness. We need not scrap matter, but must ennoble and spiritualize it.

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KĀMĀSIKĀṢṬAKAM OF ŚRĪ VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA: Translation and notes by M.K. Srinivasan and K.P. Rangaswami. Published by Sri Vedanta Desika Research Centre, 2 Lakshmipuram, 2nd Street, Villivakkam, Chennai 600049. 1998. Pp. xv+69.

Of the three postures in which Viṣṇu is seen in his temples—lying, standing, and sitting—his sitting posture is rare and is usually seen only in images of Lord Narasimha. That is the posture he assumed when he took the demon Hiranyakaśipu on his lap and killed him. The present hymn by Vedānta Deśika, one of the greatest post-Rāmānujācāryas of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, is particularly addressed to Lord Narasimha at Velirukkai, near Kañci. The hymn is one of the series which Deśika wrote on the different aspects of Viṣṇu at Kañci.

The title of this work, *Kāmāsikāṣṭakam*, means eight stanzas (*aṣṭakam*) on he who is firmly seated by his own free will or desire (*kāmāsikā*). The word *kāmāsikā* is also the Sanskrit name for the town of Velirukkai. For the devotee, having the Lord firmly seated or established is extremely important—whether that be in a temple, where we can approach him directly, or in our own hearts, where he is closest of all but harder to see.

Vedānta Deśika points out in this work that the *avatāra* of Lord Narasimha was especially meant for protecting the devotee. And that this protection was not just for Prahlāda but is for all the Lord's devotees is shown by his having established himself at Velirukkai in a meditative form, with eyes indrawn, contemplating on 'humanity at large before Him.'

Like the other works in this series, two translations and commentaries for the same hymn are given, and are presented separately in the same volume. Thus, after reading both translations, the reader not only gets a thorough feeling for the hymn itself, but also is highly rewarded by the thoughtful notes and comments written on the hymn by two scholar-devotees M.K. Srinivasan and K.P. Rangaswami. Though the man-lion form the Lord took was fierce and terrifying in its wrath towards Hiranyakaśipu, it was at the same time gentle and endearing for the sake of his beloved devotee, Prahlāda. These two aspects are beautifully brought out in these two translations—both works of great devotion.

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**THE ONENESS/OTHERNESS MYSTERY: By
Sutapas Bhattacharya. Published by Mo-
tilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Jawahar Nagar,
New Delhi 110007. 1999.**

In his monumental work, Sri Sutapas Bhattacharya claims to resolve the central problems of eastern and western philosophy. That is, he has tried to solve the problem of the 'mystical union' and the 'mind-body'. *The Oneness/Otherness Mystery* is an honest and sincere attempt to synthesize science and mysticism.

I must appreciate the author for his efforts. But, what appeared to me while going through the work was that it sometimes distracts us from the main focus. What I feel is that one should devote oneself to write different books based on different ideas. In the chapter titled 'My Path to the Light', the author has tried to describe his own experience and exciting journey into the inner world. But the main debate on the issue of mind-body problem and the role of consciousness in physical theories is not clear. There appears to be some confusion too. Here is an example of the author's style: 'The identification of "prana" with "atman", the descriptions of the pulsating, vibrating consciousness in Kashmiri Shaivism and Gaudapada's interpretation of the phenomenal world being the result of Chit-taspandita (the vibrations of the mind-stuff)....' In Kashmiri Shaivism (ie, *Spandakārikā* or *Spandanirṇaya*), the *spanda* is not the vibration which we perceive in the physical world. In the physical world, we get vibration if there is any disturbance in the medium—say, sound or *nāda*. There are two kinds of *nāda*—*āhata* (struck) and *anāhata* (not struck). The *spanda* in consciousness is *anāhata*. This cannot be perceived with our intellect. The Kashmiri Shaivites introduced the concept of *nīmeṣa* and *unmeṣa* (ie, emergence and absorption respectively) as the *spanda* or a kind of logical ordering. The mind-stuff is considered as finer matter and the body as the gross matter. So where one deals with words like *spanda* and *citta-spandita* or vibrations in consciousness, one has to be very cautious about using the formal language.

It is worth mentioning here that in modern physics, the fluctuation of vacuum is drawing much attention nowadays. Here, vacuum is not completely empty or devoid of anything. In the Upanishads the word *nāśad* is used for ultimate Reality. This word can be split as *na+a+sad*. *Sad* means existence, *asad* means negation of existence and *nāśad* means the negation of negation, ie, existence in the positive sense. In Buddhist philosophy *śūnya vāda* plays an important role. So one should discuss these concepts in detail, especially in the

light of modern physics in a book like the present one.

Then, the author has discussed the idea of 'Implicate Order and Wholeness', used by Bohm in the context of quantum measurement problem. But this issue has not been properly discussed further in this book. In the 'perennial philosophy', the concept of wholeness has been discussed repeatedly in various places. Apparently this concept of wholeness seems to be different from that used by Bohm in quantum mechanics. But if one looks at a deeper level, one can find a remarkable similarity. Time and Will in quantum mechanics clearly indicate a strong similarity between 'perennial philosophy' and the problems of measurement in quantum mechanics. This kind of similarity would help the readers to have a comprehensive picture regarding the ultimate Reality.

Another point I would like to mention is that the author has not elaborated any single idea, remaining within the framework of a particular branch of science, say, physics or biology or philosophy. Many people are not aware of the different concepts used in different branches of science. For example, the author quotes the word 'superstring'. But he has not made readers even a little aware of the preliminary concepts or characteristics of the string theory, even at the qualitative level. The main idea of string is that it is a one-dimensional object and the basic building block of all matter in the universe. This is like the *sūtrātman* of the *Bhagavadgītā*. There is ample scope of elaborating this idea at the philosophical level. Mysticism is not as mystical as it is but the real experience of mankind of the ultimate Reality. In this sense we should not use the phrase 'perennial philosophy' to this but the word *darśana* which would do well to contrast with western philosophy, which is merely theorization.

The publishers, who are internationally reputed for their wonderful publications could suggest to the author to divide the contents of the book into a few smaller volumes. The author has, however, to be lauded for his novel thinking.

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**ANUV RATAM: KARISHYE VACHANAM
TAVA: By Charu Jalandhwala. Published
by Bharat Sevashrama, Vashi Village,
Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400003. Pp. 96.
Rs.50.**

Anuvratam, or the study of the *Bhagavadgita*, is a bunch of thoughts, logically strung, aimed at

logically putting forth a new study of the *Bhagavadgita*. Instead of explaining the *Gita* verses, the author has taken up some key terms from the scripture and tried to present the message of the *Gita*. The words themselves are held as sacred commandments; the rest is their exposition. The book has 16 chapters, with 14 key terms as chapter headings. The book begins with 'Karishye Vachanam Tava' ('I shall do what you say') — a confessional declaration by Arjuna in the 18th chapter. This is significant. For spiritual journey cannot even begin without a willingness on the part of the aspirant to follow what is taught by the spiritual master. Once this willingness is assured, the rest follows. A spirit of self-surrender or receptivity to what is taught is the very first step to spiritual growth. This receptivity is followed by the second commandment, 'Therefore Arise', which forms the second chapter of the book. A slight mixing up of terms in one or two places could have been avoided, but the author takes the reader beautifully through a spiritual journey in the subsequent chapters. The book makes interesting reading, especially for those who are willing to develop further interest in the study of the *Bhagavadgita*.

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THE MAHABHARATA—AN ENGLISH VERSION BASED ON SELECTED VERSES: By Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan. Published by Motilal Banarsidass. 1999. Pp. 254. Rs.195.

The *Mahabharata* of Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan, as its subtitle indicates, is an English version based on the translation of some selected verses. In the Preface, the author states that the translation of selected verses from the *Mahabharata* was suggested to him by Prof Embree of Columbia University in 1960, and it was encouraged by Prof de Bary. Narasimhan's rendition of the *Mahabharata* deals with a straightforward narrative account of the main theme: the rivalry between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The *Mahabharata* is the largest epic

in any language, and it consists of some 88,000 verses in its shortest form. The author's commitment to the task at hand is indicated in the meticulous attention to detail that is evident in the translations. The process of selection reduced the total number of verses to be translated to about 4000. Instead of a translation, there is a transcreation. Instead of a literal translation from the original Sanskrit into English an attempt has been made to approximate closely the meaning of the original Sanskrit. Such an exercise obviously would have its own limitations. The *Mahabharata* has three narrators, Shanti for 'Adi Parva'; Sanjaya for 'Bhishma', 'Drona' and 'Salya' Parvas; and Vaishampayana for the rest. The *Mahabharata* also contains many episodes that are not related to the main theme. It also consists of extensive sections that are concerned mainly with ethics, polity or philosophy. The author regretfully states that his work had to leave out any references to the narrators, and practically the whole of 'Shanti Parva' and 'Anushasana Parva', which are important from the didactic point of view. This is the first translation based mainly on the Poona critical edition of the *Mahabharata* which is considered to be the most scholarly and the most authoritative. But here again certain well known episodes have been omitted.

In spite of these drawbacks, the book is engrossing and eminently readable. The book has been arranged in chapters and paragraphs, and each paragraph is a translation mainly of a group of connected verses. A useful guideline is that at the end of the book the chapters are correlated to the original Sanskrit. The book ends with a pertinent Glossary, a List of Alternative Names, and an extremely useful Index of Verses. The translations have a fluidity of style coupled with a simplicity of exposition. This book, by concentrating on one important aspect of the *Mahabharata*, sharpens the reader's desire to read the whole epic in its entirety. It is an invaluable asset, and an indispensable ally to counter the turmoils of one's existence both physical and spiritual.

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The weaker a thing, the more it is restless; the stronger it is, the calmer and steadier it is. A little plant bends and quivers at the slightest breeze, but the Himalayas remain unmoved in the fiercest storms.... Constant restlessness of the mind shows its weakness, its flimsiness.

—Swami Ramakrishnananda